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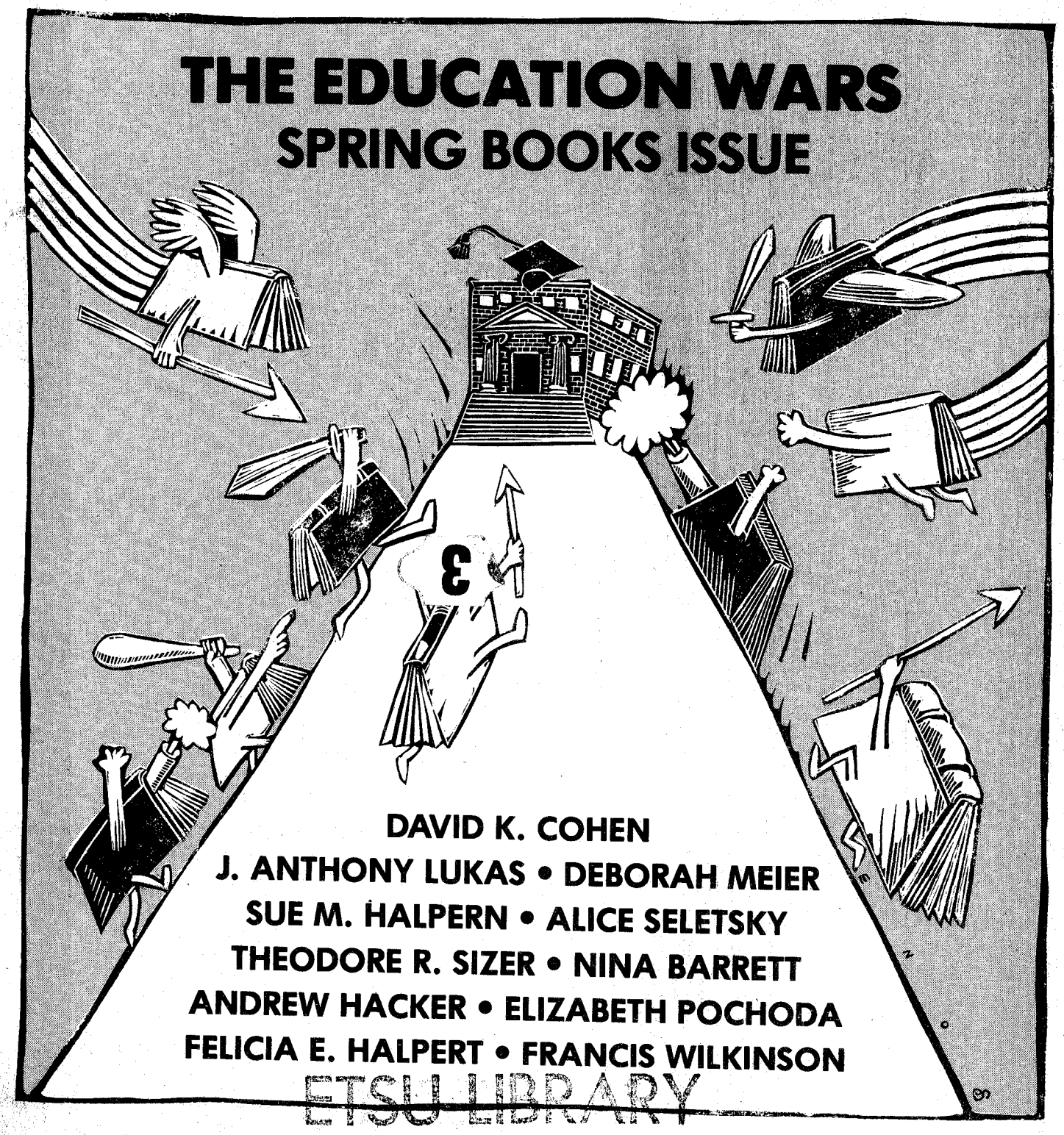
THE EDUCATION WARS
SPRING BOOKS ISSUE
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LETTERS.

SLANDER IN ACADEMIA

Washington

I congratulate Jonathan Wiener for his superb article "Footnotes to History," about the scandalous academic assault on Professor David Abraham [Feb. 16]. Unfortunately, such attacks are menacingly familiar. A few points must be added, however, if we are to learn from Abraham's horrible experience.

First, the campaign by Professors Henry Turner and Gerald Feldman has been quite unusual, not for its content so much as for the fact that it was forced into public view after much of the damage had been done in private. Slanderous campaigns against candidates for academic positions, regularly orchestrated by detractors within hiring departments, are typically conducted on the sly, behind the convenient cover of confidentiality. For all his trouble, Abraham could at least identify his accusers and fight back—a rare privilege.

Second, the attack on Abraham, while a transparent assault on his politics and character, was nevertheless focused on his scholarly work and professional competence—another rare honor. Political attacks, especially in cases of demonstrated scholarly ability such as Abraham's, are usually focused on alleged "unprofessional" activities or, more commonly, on the unsatisfactory "collegiality" or character of the candidate: whether he or she will "fit in." It is highly unusual for a scholar to have the opportunity to defend his or her work.

Third, although the actions of campaigners like Turner and Feldman are deplorable, the onus should also be placed on those in academia who yield to such malignant pressure, who allow unsolicited letters and telephone calls to influence their decisions. Those who acquiesce are as culpable as the participants. Without that acquiescence, on the part of individuals, departments and professional organizations (the American Historical Association in Abraham's case), such campaigns could never get off the ground, much less be effective.

Finally, it would be a serious and self-serving error for readers of *The Nation* to assume that this dirty work is done only by the right against a hapless left, as Wiener's article suggests. Although that might have been the case with Abraham and although it is true that conservatism is in the ascendant in academia vis à vis a moribund left, the right has no monopoly on such insidious and injurious intrigue. While the left might wield less influence, it has been routinely involved in such campaigns, either against conservatives or, more successfully, against leftists who have refused to ratify political pretensions or condone careerist compromises. And sins of commission have been matched by sins of omission: leftist academics rarely refuse to acquiesce in the face of such campaigns, as the Abraham case demonstrated. I have witnessed such dishonorable compliance in recent years on the part of leftist academics in the Science, Technology and Society program at M.I.T., the history department at the University of Wisconsin and the Community Studies Board of the University of California, Santa Cruz. Commonly, and ironically, durable support for embattled leftist candidates has come from middle-of-the-road academics and old-time liberals who continue to uphold some standard of professional integrity and civility, often at considerable risk to their careers.

In short, the slander campaigns in academia are political in only the smallest sense of the term. More significant, they are symptomatic of pervasive careerism and its attendant disorders—notably pathological insecurity and cowardice—and owe their effectiveness to it. They cut across ideological lines and are endemic to the spiritually sad world of academia, attesting again and again to the moral and intellectual impoverishment of our centers of higher learning. Yes, we must learn from the Abraham episode, but we must be sure that the lessons we draw are the correct ones, however difficult to confront, rather than the convenient ones.

David F. Noble

NONPARTISAN REVIEWS

New York City

Does Paul Berman dislike *all* theater that expresses commitment to progressive or revolutionary values and movements? Is good political theater only *critical of*, never *in solidarity with*? That question occurred to me after reading his reviews of plays to which my responses were very different from his ["Theater," March 16 and 23].

Berman didn't like Ekkehard Schall performing songs and poems of Bertolt Brecht, but he did like *Tracers*. Berman seems to like Brecht's "sickle" but not his "hammer"; his satire and ambiguity but not his revolutionary partisanship and working-class solidarity. He feels that Schall's performance degenerated into a "communist rant." I found his performance exhilarating, totally unlike the glossy, mindless cabaret acts we're used to. Certainly he was militant, but he also spoke of love, sometimes with humor. With his matter-of-fact delivery, Schall reminded me of both a tailor and an English professor I know. There was a starkness to the material and the performance, but a "communist rant"?

In the same review, Berman praises *Tracers*, a "war is hell" ensemble piece performed by Vietnam veterans. I agree that it is effective theater, but I found it sad that after all these years the play showed absolutely no understanding of what the war in Vietnam was about, how we got involved and what the larger issues were. Sympathy for our countrymen who fought and died is one thing, but political ignorance leaves us vulnerable to a repeat performance.

In his review of the Broadway play *Pack of Lies*, Berman makes two surprising comments in passing. First, he dismisses Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine* as one of those plays that are "faintly malodorous," that were "written during the age of Stalin, and . . . show it"—one of those "morality tales for a movement devoted to amorality." It's not clear which movement Berman feels is amoral: the anti-Nazi resistance, which is part of Hellman's play, and/or the Support Joe Stalin Movement, which is not. Is it simply the partisanship for a political cause that upsets him?

Berman winds up his article with a call for plays that would explain how idealists in the West "ruined their lives serving a Soviet tyranny." He argues that "the balconies would fill with people weeping their eyes out" at this sort of play. That may be, but I thought our culture had enough exposés of Soviet tyranny and was surprised to see *The Nation*'s theater critic plumping for more.

Is "War is hell" and "Expose the Soviet tyranny" Berman's favorite political theater? Over Brecht and Hellman? From one Paul to another: say it ain't so.

Paul Leavin

BERMAN REPLIES

New York City

Ekkehard Schall recited excerpts from the Communist Manifesto. He was superb. His face contorted in anger, his hands clenched, spit shot from his mouth. And I know a communist rant when I hear one.

Paul Leavin is correct to observe that *Tracers* fails to explain the social, economic and political causes of the war in Vietnam. Judged as a pamphlet, the play is definitely remiss.

As for Lillian Hellman, I mentioned her along with Clifford Odets and Bertolt Brecht as authors of plays showing that "the ends justify the means." I admire these plays in varying degrees, certainly more than I admire Hugh Whitemore's *Pack of Lies*. My point was that a fondness for the virtues of personal betrayal was much in evidence among left-wing playwrights of fifty years ago, and this fondness reflected a political culture whose home was Stalin's Soviet Union. Surely no one will quarrel with that historical observation. And surely no one wants a return to the days when critics were asked to judge plays by how they stood on the Soviet Union and other political questions.

Paul Berman

The Nation welcomes letters—typed, double spaced and no longer than 300 words, please. Letters may be edited for reasons of space.

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CONTENTS.

Volume 240, Number 20

LETTERS
610

EDITORIALS
611 Embattled Books
612 Mobile Castle
612 Out in the Kohl — *Norman Birnbaum*
613 Baseball and Drugs — *Robert Lipsyte*

COLUMNS
614 Minority Report — *Christopher Hitchens*

BOOKS & THE ARTS
615 National Coalition of Advocates for Students: Barriers to Excellence
Hispanic Policy Development Project: Make Something Happen — *David K. Cohen*

Cover drawing by Randall Enos

623 Wolters: The Burden of Brown
Hochschild: The New American Dilemma
Hawley: Strategies for Effective Desegregation
Rossell and Hawley, eds.: The Consequences of School Desegregation — *J. Anthony Lukas*
626 Oakes: Keeping Track — *Deborah Meier*
630 Ravitch: The Schools We Deserve
Bunzel, ed.: Challenge to American Schools — *Sue M. Halpern*
634 Where the Action Is — *Alice Seletsky*
639 Macchiarola and Hauser: For Our Children — *Theodore R. Sizer*
640 Owen: None of the Above — *Nina Barrett*
643 Kozol: Illiterate America — *Andrew Hacker*
645 Everything's Up-to-Date In Minnesota — *Elizabeth Pochoda*
651 One Step Forward . . . — *Felicia E. Halpert*
652 Book Notes — *Francis Wilkinson & Elizabeth Pochoda*

Editor, Victor Navasky

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EDITORIALS.

Embattled Books

The books that make up the American exhibits at the periodic Moscow International Book Fair usually provoke criticism and clumsy attempts at censorship from Soviet authorities. The challenge and the response is part of the propaganda game, and if Soviet political attacks are not exactly welcomed by the U.S. exhibitors, they are expected.

This year the criticism and the clumsy attempts at censor-

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ship come from an unexpected source: an organization established by the Reagan Administration to export American values to the rest of the world. The National Endowment for Democracy did not pick the 313 titles American publishers are sending to the book fair this September, but it did provide a $50,000 grant to the International Freedom to Publish Committee of the Association of American Publishers to help mount the exhibit. The N.E.D. thus felt it had a right to register its dismay when a group of literary types, headed by Kurt Vonnegut and including members of the New York and Philadelphia public libraries, came up

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with a list of titles somewhat more liberal than the current Washington *Zeitgeist*.

The N.E.D. is supposed to be bipartisan, which means its letterhead contains names from the dead centers of both major political parties, plus one or two tokens from the near left and far right. The dominant tendency in the narrow coalition, however, is "neo": neoliberal, neoconservative, neo-social democrat, neo-neo. Its intellectual project is less the celebration of American democracy than it is the condemnation of American liberalism, which is how the neos define the American left.

The N.E.D. asked several kindred neos to vet the Vonnegut committee's list for liberal bias. Martin Peretz, owner of *The New Republic*; William Phillips, editor of *Partisan Review*; Joseph Epstein, editor of *The American Scholar*; and novelist Saul Bellow examined the titles and discovered several horrors. Seymour Hirsch's *The Price of Power*, Jonathan Kwitny's *Endless Enemies* and Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth* were singled out for special calumny. Neopolemicist Charles Krauthammer, writing in *The Washington Post*, broke the story of the Vonnegut list and launched a bitter attack on it.

N.E.D. president Carl Gershman tried to get John Macrae 3d, chair of the International Freedom to Publish Committee, to expand the list to include the ideological opposites of Kwitny, Hirsch et al. Surely there are recent books favoring nuclear war, corporate imperialism, *Realpolitik* and Reaganism. What kind of red deviltry produces a list that includes *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*; *Cross-Country Skiing Right*; *Kitchens: How to Plan, Install & Remodel*; and Michael Harrington's *The New American Poverty*—and excludes works by Irving Kristol and Michael Novak?

But the publishers are determined to exhibit the list they chose. An annotated catalogue, in Russian and English, is in the works. The committee has asked the N.E.D. for an apology; if none is forthcoming, it says it will return the portion of the grant money it has received. The committee now says it will not take official funds for its work in the future, but it never should have sought the grant in the first place. The publishers in the association could have easily come up with the money; the sum would barely cover a week's editorial lunches at The Four Seasons.

Vonnegut calls the affair a tempest in a teapot, which it is, but it involves something more: the ongoing battle between the neos and the liberals for control of the intellectual life in Reagan's America. The neos have been on a roll, and they were understandably shocked to see life in the old liberals this late in the 1980s. Perhaps it's a sign of life that offers hope for more victories.

The skirmishes over our schools continue, and there, too, books provide much of the ammunition for all sides. In an effort to keep the debate (and the schools) public, we devote the Spring Books Issue to education.

GOING AWAY FOR THE SUMMER?

If you would like *The Nation* to follow you, please let us know your plans at least six to eight weeks in advance. We need your current address, temporary address and the dates of your departure and return. Please send the information to *The Nation*, Temporary Address Change, Box 1953, Marion, OH 43305.

Mobile Castle

As Herman Schwartz recently observed in *The Nation*, the conservative Justices on the Supreme Court "want judicial restraint only in the protection of individual rights" ["Reagan Packs the Federal Judiciary," May 4]. When it comes to upholding officialdom, they become flaming activists, especially in the area of search and seizure.

The latest depredation against the Fourth Amendment came last week in *California v. Carney*, a case involving the warrantless search of a recreational vehicle. After receiving a tip that a camper parked in a lot in downtown San Diego was being used for pot and sex parties, the police raided it and found quantities of the forbidden weed. Charles Carney, the owner of the vehicle, was arrested and convicted of possessing drugs for sale. On appeal the California Supreme Court held that his camper was a home and the cops should have obtained a search warrant before entering.

In his majority opinion, Chief Justice Warren Burger said that Carney's RV wasn't a home; it was a car and thus could be searched without a warrant under a line of decisions going back sixty years. There are 8 million RVs like Carney's on the road now, but as Justice John Paul Stevens pointed out in his dissent, most of their owners use them as quasi vacation homes. Should the ability to turn the ignition key entitle them to less privacy than people occupying a fishing shack or a hotel room? (And how about those who live on boats?) We are a mobile society; people must travel long distances to find sylvan settings in which to rest and recreate. Citizens who convey living quarters in the back of the car should not be treated like latter-day Okies. The right of privacy should be as portable as a Coleman stove or an air mattress.

Out in the Kohl

The enthusiastic reception President Reagan received from the European right during his visit to West Germany proved that the United States is a participant in an international ideological conflict. Many of the most vocal pro-American elements in West Germany do not admire our democratic egalitarianism or our ethnic, racial and religious pluralism. They respect in America the authoritarian values—power, success and wealth. The invitation to Bitburg enabled Germans to express the anti-Semitism they have never overcome. Thus Chancellor Helmut Kohl's press secretary, Peter Boenisch,

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Greater Expectations

DAVID K. COHEN

BARRIERS TO EXCELLENCE: Our Children at Risk. *Board of Inquiry, National Coalition of Advocates for Students (76 Summer Street #350, Boston, MA 02110). 162 pp. $5.50.*

MAKE SOMETHING HAPPEN: Hispanics and Urban High School Reform. *National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics. Hispanic Policy Development Project (1001 Connecticut Avenue N.W., Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036). 163 pp. No charge.*

The last four years have seen a rising tide of criticism of American high schools. This is nothing new. High schools have been under attack for one shortcoming or another since the early 1950s: slipping in the science race with the Russians; delaying desegregation; denying equal opportunity to Hispanics, women and handicapped students; freezing the First Amendment rights of politically active students and faculty; allowing test scores to decline. But in one respect the recent criticism is a little unusual, for most of it focuses on the quality of academic work. Academic quality has not been high on reformers' lists since the 1950s, when Arthur Bestor, James Conant and Adm. Hyman Rickover drew a bead on the deficiencies of secondary education.

The recent critiques are a mixed bag. They are strong on quantity: never have so many groups issued so many rebukes to high-school educators at one time. Literally hundreds of reports have been published, studying and criticizing the schools' performance and suggesting many changes in public education. States and localities are pushing ahead with the recommended changes, and a cottage industry of reports and studies on the reports has sprung up. But if the quantity of criticism is new, the general drift of reform proposals is not. They too focus on quantity, chiefly the quantity of academic requirements. Reformers want to boost the number of science courses necessary for graduation, bring back more math and foreign language requirements and the like. This approach to quality—what one scholar termed the "remote control" of education—is hardly new; state education agencies and pressure groups have been at it ever since high-school attendance began to boom late in the nineteenth century. All through the first four decades of the twentieth century, state governments tried to regulate curriculum content and quality by adding, subtracting or modifying course and graduation requirements for high schools.

Most states continued this habit after World War II. Science and foreign language requirements were strengthened in the 1950s. In the 1960s and 1970s they were relaxed or relinquished, while different ones were added: requirements for equal treatment of minorities or more help for low achievers. The recent reform efforts thus continue an old tradition of state intervention.

Some worries about such an approach to reform would be predictable in any epoch. Quantity is an uncertain and often misleading index of quality, especially in such subtle matters as cultivation of the mind. And laying on legal requirements can be a cheap substitute for more thoughtful, time-consuming and costly efforts to cultivate intellectual quality in local schools. Other worries are more specific to our own time. The current enthusiasm for high-school reform stems in part from several decades of accumulating hostility to the egalitarian reforms of the 1960s and to their presumed deleterious educational consequences. Partisans of egalitarian reform have worried that the current enthusiasm for quality will erode earlier gains for equality.

The two reports considered here arise partly from such worries. They seek to reform the conversation about school reform by calling attention to the continuing educational problems of racial minorities and other disadvantaged groups. They point out, for instance, the appalling dropout rates for Hispanic and black high-school students, rates which sometimes reach 60 or 70 percent. They call attention to the educational damage that can be done by academic tracking within high schools. They worry about the educational losses for disadvantaged and disabled students that follow on cuts in Federal education programs. They remind us that the decade of egalitarian school reform that began with Lyndon Johnson's Presidency was but a brief reversal of long-established habits of discrimination and neglect. And they argue that unless America continues strenuous efforts to reverse those old habits, the current campaign to improve educational quality will, by design or default, increase the educational gap between students from advantaged and ambitious families and those from families that are poor, neglected and lacking hope.

If these two reports had done nothing else, they would deserve our sympathetic attention. They make a serious and thoughtful effort to change the direction of current debate and action concerning public schools. They tell us nothing that is new about the educational problems of minority and disadvantaged students, but their message is no less important for being familiar.

Two things are new about these reports, though, and each deserves a bit of thought. One is that they argue for egalitarian school reform more than a decade after the end of America's only serious effort at such reform. How do these advocates of more equality cope with what we have learned since then about the effects and difficulties of such reform? Another novelty is that both reports argue for egalitarian school reform at a time when the economy is not working in the ways that liberals have come to expect. Unemployment is high, at least by 1960s standards, and unemployment among the young is very high—40 or 50 percent for minority youth in many cities. What is more, most new jobs are found in low-skill service work, not in skilled or even semiskilled manufacturing, let alone in high-skill enterprises. How does one argue for better high-school education for the poor and otherwise disadvantaged when the prospects for work are so disheartening?

Liberal reformers did not have to worry about such nasty economic issues in the salad days of school reform. For one thing, most 1960s educational reform focused on the elementary schools or on preschool children, and unlike high-school students, graduates of elementary schools don't go on to work.

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With a few exceptions they go on to high school, and this relieved reformers of serious pressure to think hard about the connections between school and work—or about what the lack of such connections might imply for schools and students. For another thing, in the mid-1960s the economy was not malfunctioning as badly as it is now. It looked as though there were plenty of places for qualified applicants, whether at work or in college, and reformers were free to concentrate on helping poor and minority students get their fair share of qualifications and places.

But by now, if liberal reformers want to argue for their favorite policies they must do so in economic circumstances that seem likely to defeat those policies. These reports are stitched through with the results. *Barriers to Excellence* stresses the "bleak picture of job prospects for students graduating or leaving high school." It frets about the "two-humped" shape of the job distribution, in which both high-skill and low-skill jobs multiply but in which the number of middle-level jobs shrinks. It decries unemployment rates so high that "many youth under 25 years of age have never held a regular job." And it notes that the growth of high technology probably will produce only a small number of skilled jobs while simultaneously reducing skill requirements in many more middle- and low-level jobs, as human capacities are replaced by electronic technology.

What are egalitarian reformers to make of such developments? How can they press forceful arguments for liberal school reform when economic change seems to be narrowing disadvantaged students' prospects?

The authors of *Barriers to Excellence* try a variety of approaches. Their favorite stratagem is to criticize the opposition. They note that nearly all the recent reports calling for quality improvement base their arguments on an old idea: better education will produce a more skilled work force, and that will insure economic survival in an increasingly competitive world economy. They then rehearse the disturbing economic evidence just summarized and point out that if it is correct, no amount of good education will protect many youngsters from dreary, low-paid, unskilled work—or from no work at all. The authors go on to ask about the effect of tightening up high-school quality in an economy whose supply of high-skill and low-skill jobs is growing, and whose supply of middle-level jobs is shrinking. The report answers that competition would intensify within schools for those skills and grades that would help students get the top jobs. And because the top jobs would be in short supply, many students would lose the competition, or never try, and drift into poorly paid unskilled labor or unemployment.

On this view of economic development then, ratcheting up quality requirements without attending to inequality would not produce a general increase in economic well-being. It would instead improve the economic situation for a small fraction of Americans while doing nothing to improve matters for most—possibly leaving them worse off. *Barriers to Excellence* also implies that under such circumstances schools would tend to legitimize inequality through academic competition. And in a stunning (but in the context of this analysis, unsurprising) reversal of classic American arguments for school reform, they challenge the old idea that better education is better for all Americans because better educated workers will boost productivity and the gross national product. Instead, they see education as driven by economic forces: when the economy sours, or grows selectively, efforts to improve school quality alone will produce sour results, benefiting some at others' expense. "Educational excellence," the report intones, "depends to a high degree on the economic health of our society." That is a new note in liberal school reform. The argument used to be the other way around.

Economic forecasting is often less exact than weather forecasting, but *Barriers*' comments on these points seem reasonable. The recent quality-reform reports are larded with naïve assertions about the effects of education on economic development and are seemingly oblivious to the ways in which economic forces push education this way and that—irrespective of efforts by educators or reformers. But for those who wish to reform the schools, what can follow such depressing criticism?

The authors of *Barriers to Excellence* try a few additional ideas. Two are quite conventional: more and better school counseling for all students to help them make more intelligent decisions about life after high school, and more and better school-to-work transition programs, so that kids from families and communities with few established links to decent jobs can still find them. These ideas are also found in the report on Hispanic education, and they seem sensible. But in light of the economic problems noted here, how much good would it do if better counseling and transition programs helped kids get work at McDonald's or at the local ice-cream parlor? It would help kids—some work is better than no work at all. But would it not tie the schools more tightly into economic arrangements that the National Coalition of Advocates for Children decries as unfair? Would not such programs help to legitimize inequality?

Barriers to Excellence does not address these questions, which does not speak well for the authors' consistency. Having just flogged the fans of school quality for pushing schemes that will compound and legitimize inequality, the authors' proposals seem to do much the same thing. Their intentions doubtless differ, but arguing for egalitarian schools in a society that distributes work and wealth very unequally places the authors of *Barriers* in an awkward position. Indeed, it always places reformers on the left in an awkward position. If they argue for programs that will do a better job of pushing the poor and otherwise disadvantaged into the existing unequal structure of work and wealth, reformers are implicitly accepting the structure. They are, in fact, pressing policies that would undoubtedly strengthen existing inequalities by making the processes that produce them seem fair and thus legitimate. Reformers of this stripe are therefore vulnerable to attacks from the left. If, on the other hand, they argue for a fundamental overhaul of the ways that work and wages are apportioned, they usually eschew short-term efforts to improve things for the victims of discrimination, poverty and neglect. That opens them to criticism, usually from moderates, that they choose political purity over common humanity. There is no way to avoid this dilemma. It is one of the persistent puzzles that confronts anyone who is troubled enough by inequality to set down ideas for reducing it. The authors of *Barriers to Excellence* follow a timeworn strategy in managing this dilemma, though. They simply ignore it. Like many who have gone before, they therefore appear to come down on both sides of the problem.

This impression is heightened by yet another stratagem of *Barriers*. Though

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OF MICE AND MEN. AND MEN AND WOMEN WHO WOULD BAN IT.

Huckleberry Finn—on the trash heap. *To Kill A Mockingbird*—in the garbage. Even *The Diary Of Anne Frank*—a work that wouldn't have been written if it weren't for a different group of book burners—is disappearing from our schools and library shelves.

They're being censored. Not in some once-upon-a-time, far off land but right here and now. In 48 of 50 states this past year.

By frightened school officials, nervous parents, and an organized far right fundamentalist network with the narrowest of religious and political views.

Librarians are removing books. Teachers are diluting lessons. Publishers are even watering down ("dumbing down") textbooks.

And once any publisher caves in, what's available to all of us across the country is affected.

The intolerant few would limit educational content. Curtail intellectual challenge. Not just for their sons and daughters, but for yours too.

What that means is students are being taught what to think. Not how to think.

You cannot lead if you're only trained to follow. Without cognitive skills, America will lose the investigative, entrepreneurial edge that has made our nation great. Tomorrow's leaders must be thinkers, not robots. Movers, not mopers.

Exercise your freedom to get involved. Support differences of opinion, diversity, dialogue. Support the freedom to learn.

So that, soon, censorship in the United States can be one of those once-upon-a-time stories.

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the report raises new worries about economic malfunctions and their effects on education, it also beats the drum for the opposite arguments about the economic value of better education. The opening section of the report reads like a replay of 1960s ideas. It asks, rhetorically, why we should "bother to invest public resources in programs for poor and minority children." And it answers, in good old-fashioned American style, that such investments make sense because they pay off in dollars. The report asserts, for instance, that Social Security taxes from a properly educated (and therefore well-employed) generation of black workers would produce more than enough revenue to keep the Social Security system solvent. It points out that solving the problems of black education would produce 30,000 computer programmers and 105,000 engineers (assuming benignly, of course, that there are jobs for these happy products of the schools). And the report uses a variety of other examples to argue that social programs pay off in American terms—in more tax revenues, more productive workers and the like.

One can think of several grounds on which to question these assertions, but the one that fairly begs for mention is consistency. Only a few short chapters later the report presents the dismal economic forecasts that I discussed. It takes no great economic insight to see that if the economy goes the way the authors fear, these presumed benefits of social program investment would not materialize. The good jobs would not be there for many graduates and—as the report points out—the jobs that did exist would discourage many students from making any special effort to get a good education. The argument for the probable economic benefits of investment in education that is made early in this report is undercut by the argument about probable economic developments that is made later. My point is not that the report should not have argued for better schools and more jobs. It is that its varied economic ideas richly reflect the puzzles that currently beset advocates of more equality.

Having tried several seemingly contrary ways of coping with relations between education and the economy, the report adds a few more. In response to its worries about economic developments to come, it calls for "broadly based community councils charged with responsibility for examining what could be done locally to revitalize the local economy and create jobs for youth." If we take this as evidence of new and broader ways to think about school reform, it seems sensible. Like the authors' worries about current economic developments, it suggests a wise skepticism about the self-serving notion of many educators and reformers that more schooling all by itself is a powerful cure for nearly any social problem. But if we also take it seriously as a way of solving economic problems and their educational consequences, the proposal seems less persuasive. Community councils might do some good in some cases, but the economic developments that actually worry the authors of this report do not arise chiefly from local communities. They are tied to national and international developments in finance, technology, labor costs and corporate organization. If the report's economic worries are correctly placed, rather different interventions would seem to be indicated.

Finally, the report doubles back on all of these economic tacks. The conclusion of the chapter on economic issues records the commission's "growing concern" during its inquiry "about the emphasis on materialistic motives . . . for education reform." There are various versions of the doctrine that lies behind this concern. One is that good education can be justified by reference to the development of humanity's most distinctive capacities. Another is that critical intelligence is desirable in a political democracy, without considering its economic benefits. Such justifications seem quite appealing, even convincing. But two objections are worth entering. One is the modest matter of consistency: the report again seems to come down on all sides of economic arguments about education, supporting several as well as opposing them all.

A more telling point is that most Americans do not share the report's worries about "materialism." An overwhelming proportion values schooling for its economic and social benefits. It is a fair bet that this report will not effect a mass conversion to a more elevated view. And it therefore seems likely that if schools are unable to deliver on their longstanding promise of economic rewards, many students will defect—either from school or just from their studies. There is some evidence that this is part of the reason that so many students, poor and minority kids chief

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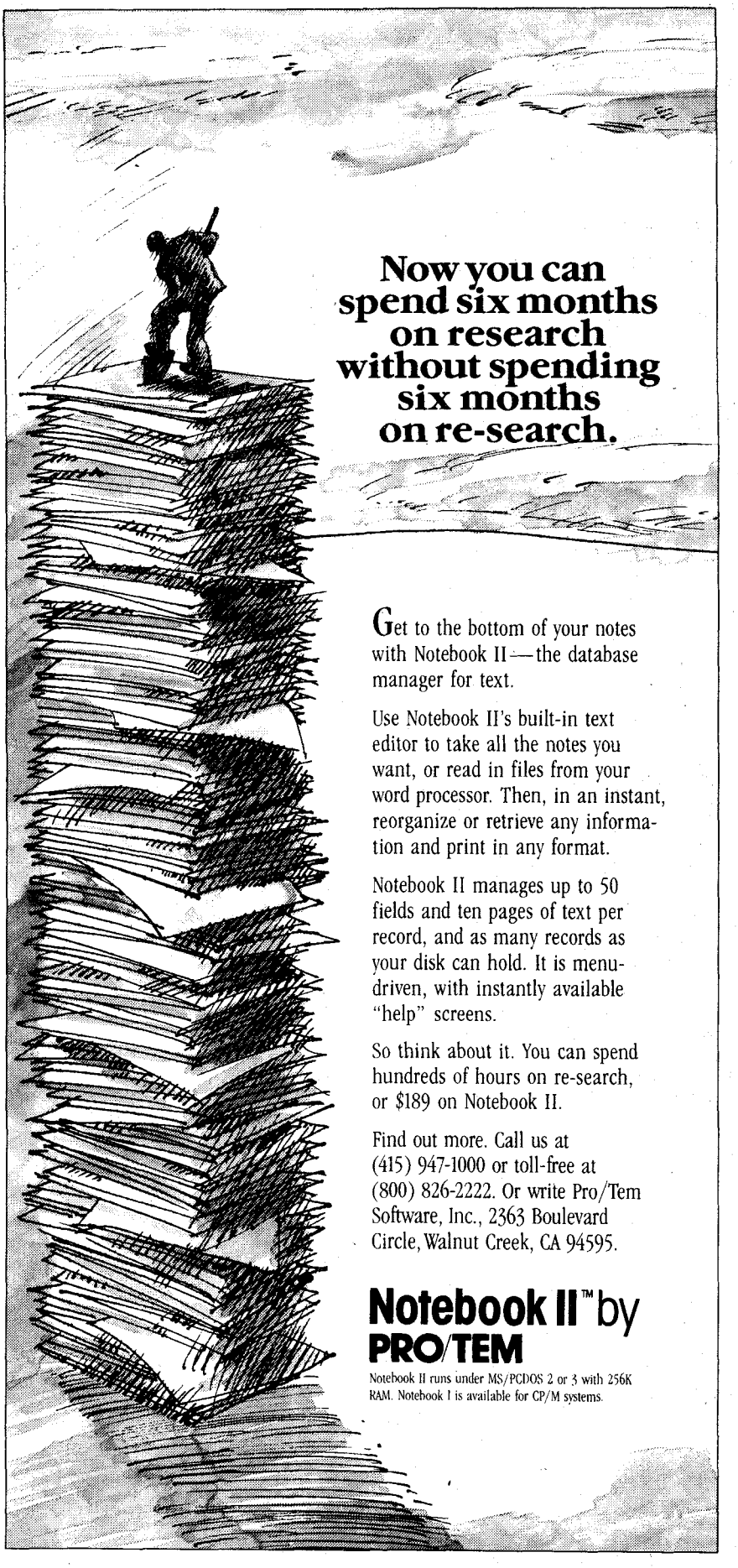
among them, don't try harder in high school now. They know that the odds for economic payoff are poor, and being good Americans, they see no other, purer reasons to bury their noses in books. That materialistic views of education are widely celebrated by students, parents and teachers is evident in most opinion polls on education, as well as in most community studies of schools. Robert and Helen Lynd pointed it out two generations ago, elegantly, in *Middletown*. This materialism—which is sometimes called anti-intellectualism—helps to explain why there is so little studying and so much dull or even awful teaching in so many American high schools. It also helps to explain why more high-minded approaches to education, and to school reform, are unlikely to make much progress in the public schools. Among other reasons, educators and school reformers—those who penned *Barriers* included—have been advertising the economic benefits of schooling too loudly, for too long. And that, in turn, throws a little light on *Barriers*' inconsistencies. The authors are doubtless sincere in their reservations about materialism, but they are no less sincere in their wish to make the economic arguments that they imagine their fellow citizens will find convincing. Thus they conclude their third chapter with a two-paragraph plea for a more intellectual approach to schooling, but devote the whole chapter, and several other passages, to arguments for a materialistic approach.

So, *Barriers* takes varied and sometimes contradictory positions on education and the economy. But to tax it with inconsistency, as if that were a flaw easily avoided, would be foolish. After all, America is inconsistent on this issue, and has been for nearly a century. Why should reformers be any different? Or, rather, could they be different and still persuade themselves that America would listen? Unlike poets or academics, reformers resist launching their best words into the pure dark, hoping for an audience but never sure of it. They want to make a difference, which to them means mobilizing opinion, not just speaking to it. They therefore find it reassuring to write in ways that their imagined audience would not find too jarring. Perhaps for this reason, *Barriers* nicely reflects Americans' ambivalence about the economic value of schooling.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Both *Barriers* and *Make Something Happen* also reflect some new puzzles, and possibilities. There is some evidence that the coming economic problem in education may not be the need for a more highly trained labor force but rather the presence of more and more workers who are already overeducated for the jobs they can get, and the production of more and more jobs that require precious little education. If that is the problem, what is the educational solution? What does one do if the educational system is adding to that problem every June? In such circumstances, how does one argue for decency and humanity in education? These worries make inherited liberal approaches to school reform seem wobbly, and inherited arguments for more education more problematic.

The other novel feature of these reports is that they are among the few efforts to restate the agenda of 1960s school reforms. How do the reports address that experience? What stance do they take toward the various lessons that have been drawn from the last episode in egalitarian reform?

The reports offer no single answer. One approach is predictable: they reassert the importance of equal treatment for poor and minority students. *Barriers* begins with a blast at revisionist ideas: "We reject the argument, so fashionable today, that all social programs have failed. . . . We also believe that the programmatic failures of the past decade have been failures of implementation rather than conception; of will rather than direction." And both reports call for more programs for minority students with special language or other problems; more programs for the handicapped; more attention to the needs of pregnant students; more effort to break down invidious distinctions among ability groups and curriculum tracks within schools; equal funding of schools; and, of course, much more money for these and other programs. This does not exhaust the list of proposals, though it does catch their flavor.

But if the two documents push ideas that we identify with the 1960s, they do it with a difference. Both stress academic quality to a degree unknown in the 1960s. The report on Hispanic students argues that "a core curriculum with clearly defined academic standards must be established for *all* students," and that "excellence must be a national goal." It also tries to defuse the politically touchy problem of bilingual education. It stresses that all Hispanic students must learn English, and presses for more effective English teaching. Teaching Spanish is not ignored, but it does take a back seat. No one came out against high standards in the 1960s, but reformers were more interested in other matters: attacking discrimination and pushing schools to attend to the diverse needs of their diverse clientele. We owe the new emphasis on quality in part to the recent critiques of high schools.

One would not mistake these reports for mainstream critiques of public schools, though. For instance, the National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics stresses a point that has been virtually ignored in the criticism of high schools thus far: that care for and commitment to students is an essential part of making serious academic demands. The commission is not rehashing pop psychology here but commenting sensibly on the realities of life and school for most Hispanic kids.

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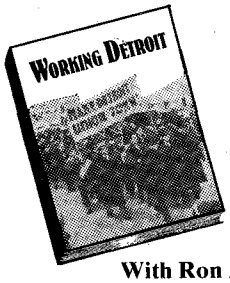

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More than half of all Puerto Rican children in the United States live in single-parent households, mostly headed by women. They are often poor, and most Hispanic children live on streets shadowed by drugs, prostitution and crime. These kids are "beleaguered." If their schools took them seriously, if they created "an atmosphere of mutual respect and dignity," these students might have a chance. Care and commitment include an appreciation of the unique problems that many Hispanic students face, but they do not include academic slacking. This report calls for "high expectations for teachers and students" precisely on the ground that such expectations help to communicate the sense of mutual respect and dignity that makes for good education. But it points out, sadly, that in most high schools Hispanic students feel "alienated, unchallenged, and unappreciated."

Increasing graduation requirements, mandating minimum competence tests and statewide curriculum guidelines, and legislating instructional time will not do much to create the respect and expectations for which the national commission hopes. The authors of *Barriers to Excellence* explain why. In an extended critique of both schools and the current reform movement, they point out that most teaching in high schools is mindless. "Current teaching practices emphasize the passivity of the learner. . . . Teachers lecture or pass out worksheets. Students listen or fill in blanks. [There is] little interaction or engagement. . . . The focus is on topics rather than concepts. Subjects are covered; little is uncovered or mastered." In this fragmented academic world, more requirements probably will just intensify the mechanical quality of life and learning. The extant arrangements shield students and teachers from engagement with one another and with their studies. The current reform movement will probably make such engagement even more difficult.

In some respects, then, these two reports have preserved an older commitment to more equality while moving beyond the 1960s in certain notable ways. I thumbed through my little library of 1960s education reports, all concerned with equality, and found none that commented as thoughtfully, or as sanely, on the educational obstacles to educational quality as *Barriers to Excellence*.

But two large problems remain. *Barriers* criticizes "fragmentation and anonymity" in high schools, but it pushes hard for more special programs. Programs for disabled students, for pregnant students, programs to eliminate cultural discrimination, programs to eliminate sex discrimination and more. Each of these is a worthy cause, and all, taken together, are a worthy agenda. But one legacy of the late 1960s and early 1970s programs of this sort was that they further fragmented curriculum and teaching in public high schools. This was not their aim, but it was the consequence of injecting several additional special demands into a school organization that had a long-established way of dealing with such demands—by parceling out the curriculum, adding new courses, new curriculums or new standards in response to the new pressures. The authors of *Barriers* argue thoughtfully and well for more special programs and for less fragmentation in the curriculum. But they give no sign of realizing that, as high schools are currently organized,

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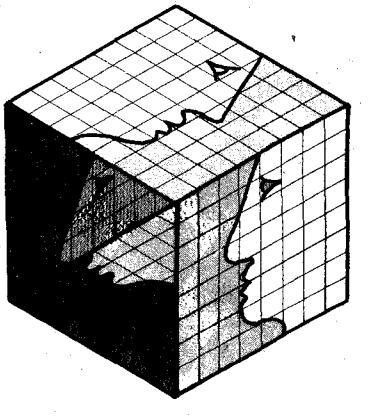

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more special programs will produce more fragmentation.

This is a serious flaw, not only in the program that is advanced in *Barriers to Excellence* but in the liberal agenda for school reform. The authors of both reports took a giant step in the right direction by recognizing the problems of fragmentation and mindless teaching. But several more steps will be needed if the centrifugal forces associated with various special programs are to be balanced by a more coherent and unified organization of high-school studies. It is ironic, but the program of egalitarian reform set out in *Barriers* would, if implemented, defeat the report's aspirations for quality improvement, just as the mechanisms to improve quality that have been adopted in mainstream reform will defeat quality. Despite *Barriers*' much greater sensitivity to many aspects of life in schools, the report seems nearly as unconscious about the organizational effects of its recommendations as are most of the mainstream reports.

The other problem, even more troublesome for liberals, arises from the notion, asserted in *Barriers to Excellence*, that "students want to learn . . . [but that] the day-to-day routine of many schools obscures this simple fact." Both reports are correct in arguing that one of the public schools' most appalling failures is their failure to expect good work from many students. And they are correct in arguing for reforms that would replace neglect with serious demands and substantial expectations.

To solve those problems would be more than a generation's work, even if all America bent its shoulder to the task. Still, it is misleading to say that students want to learn but are kept from doing so by schools. Even in the best high schools there are numbers of students who simply don't want to learn what schools have to teach. Schools cannot do everything well. They cannot "meet everyone's needs" any more than they can get everyone to achieve above the mean. Schools that try to satisfy all appetites—roughly the program of public high schools for the last six or seven decades—mainly satisfy the appetite for easy sailing.

This is not just a quibble. Schools' past efforts to be all things to all people have led them into many difficulties. The thin and often flatulent character of high-school studies is the result of an old historical alliance between reformers' passion to press more and more social problems on schools and educators' self-serving embrace of the doctrine that more schooling is the best medicine for every person and any problem. One result has been a population—of students, teachers and parents—that has little sense of the sort of thoughtful, intellectually demanding study that the authors of these reports want. This result of secondary education is probably the greatest barrier to its improvement. Probably the next most serious barrier is colleges and universities that fail to provide thoughtful and demanding studies for students who are able and willing to take up teaching as a career. But further down the list there is yet another barrier—the notion that students want to learn but are frustrated by schools. Certainly all students want to learn lots of things, and certainly many are frustrated by schools. But much of what most students want to learn has no place in schools, and some students don't want to learn any of the things that schools properly can teach. Or they don't want to learn those things when law and convention decree that youngsters must study. For these and other reasons, school will not be a hospitable place for all students, especially all late adolescents. Some students will not add anything to their schools. Some will subtract.

It probably is an affront to inherited liberal ideas, but high schools will never be able to do justice to most students if Americans cannot invent constructive and fair alternatives for those youths for whom a few more years of school is too little, too much or not right just then. There is no shortage of worthy ideas: James Coleman invented some and revived others in his early 1970s report, *Youth: Transition to Adulthood.* Theodore Sizer explored a few in his recent book *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School.* National youth service, a lower school-leaving age coupled with lifelong education entitlements, work apprenticeship programs and on-the-job schooling programs are a few. These are not sops for minorities or the underclass. Most of the ill-served high-school students are white and not poor, though poor and minority kids get more than their fair share of lousy teaching. Recent studies of high schools—most notably, Philip Cusick's *The Egalitarian Ideal and the American High School*—make plain that the students for whom high school

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is a poor fit are a mixed lot. Indeed, one way of viewing Coleman's and Sizer's proposals is as means to provide, for ordinary and poor kids, the sorts of alternatives that affluent parents already find in the private market when their kids cannot hack it in high school, or cannot hack it on society's schedule.

No school can promote quality teaching and learning when an appreciable minority of students or teachers defect from those aims. The greater the defection, the more the institution must turn to compulsion or compromise to manage the dissent. Either solution compromises quality and commitment for other students and teachers. Both are mortal enemies of good education. Liberals need to find ways to affirm society's obligations to all youth without placing the whole load on schools. □

Black, White and *Brown*

J. ANTHONY LUKAS

THE BURDEN OF BROWN: Thirty Years of School Desegregation. *By Raymond Wolters. University of Tennessee Press. 246 pp. $24.95.*

THE NEW AMERICAN DILEMMA: Liberal Democracy and School Desegregation. *By Jennifer L. Hochschild. Yale University Press. 263 pp. $27. Paper $8.95.*

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE DESEGREGATION. *By Willis D. Hawley. Lexington Books. 210 pp. $26.50. Paper $14.*

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION. *Edited by Christine H. Rossell and Willis D. Hawley. Temple University Press. 221 pp. $34.95.*

Thirty-one years ago this month, in a companion case to *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court commanded the desegregation of Washington's public schools. "In view of our decision that the Constitution prohibits the states from maintaining racially segregated public schools," the court ruled in *Bolling v. Sharpe*, "it would be unthinkable that the same Constitution would impose a lesser duty on the Federal Government."

Only eight days later, the District of Columbia Board of Education adopted a desegregation policy. On September 13, Washington's public schools opened with mixed classes and faculties.

This spring, 92.7 percent of the students in Washington's public schools are black, 3.69 percent are white and the remainder are "other minorities," which makes Washington the most segregated big-city school district in the country.

What is one to make of such conditions in the nation's capital, often within sight of the marble temple from which those historic rulings issued a third of a century ago? Even if one acknowledges that the District's population is 70 percent black and 27 percent white, one wonders whether this can be what the Warren Court—not to mention the Founding Fathers—intended.

One thing is clear—any white judges, representatives, senators, Presidential assistants, senior bureaucrats and journalists who may still live in the District aren't sending their children to the public schools. They must have them squirreled away in private or parochial schools, carefully insulated from the integration to which many of them pay professional lip service.

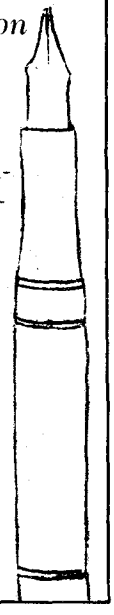
In *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation*, Raymond Wolters uses the Washington schools as evidence of judicial activism run amok. If he grudgingly accepts the necessity for *Bolling v. Sharpe*, he excoriates appellate court Judge J. Skelly Wright for subsequent rulings which prohibited the "tracking" of students by ability and other measures that would have preserved white enclaves in the District schools. "In the name of the Constitution [Wright] delivered the school system to excesses of disorder and academic experimentation," driving the remaining whites out of the schools. "The story of public education in Washington since 1954," Wolters

J. Anthony Lukas is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author and journalist. Some of the themes in this review are drawn from his book Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families, *to be published in September by Alfred A. Knopf.*

The Labor of Words

Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era

Christopher P. Wilson



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argues, "is an object lesson illustrating the perils of sentimental pedagogy and judicial arrogance," demonstrating the need for strict new limits on judicial authority.

In *The New American Dilemma: Liberal Democracy and School Desegregation*, Jennifer Hochschild sees the same situation very differently. To her, Washington—and other heavily black inner-city systems—are powerful evidence of systemic racism and a rigid class structure. They demonstrate the need for America to shuck its preference for piecemeal, "incremental" progress and embark on a bold program of metropolitan desegregation which would cross district lines, embracing suburban whites who thought they had escaped such strictures. And precisely because such sweeping measures would be widely opposed—probably by most of the nation—America must abandon its allegiance to "popular control" and impose desegregation by "authoritative," even "coercive," means.

In *The Consequences of School Desegregation* and *Strategies for Effective Desegregation*, Willis Hawley, Christine Rossell and their colleagues eschew apocalyptic conclusions from either end of the ideological spectrum. Although far closer to Hochschild than to Wolters, they lean toward the very incrementalism that Hochschild rejects. Shunning the large normative questions, they prefer to ask, "How can we increase the benefits and decrease the costs of desegregation?" If this sometimes makes for pedestrian reading, it also makes good sense.

These four books are fresh evidence that school desegregation in America still scrapes the raw nerve endings of race and class.

Raymond Wolters, a professor of history at the University of Delaware, would have us believe that he set out to write an "interesting account" of desegregation in the five districts whose litigation was consolidated in the *Brown* decision. He insists that his primary goal was "not to prove a point or offer solutions to legal and educational problems."

Indeed, he had an intriguing notion for a book. The five areas that gave rise to those original suits—Washington, D.C.; Prince Edward County, Virginia; Clarendon County, South Carolina; New Castle County, Delaware; and Topeka, Kansas—present a spectrum of regional, ethnic and class conditions. A dispassionate, evenhanded examination of desegregation in the five localities would have proved illuminating. But that isn't what we get here. His disclaimers notwithstanding, Wolters has written a polemic designed to show that "the Constitution has . . . suffered as judges have arrogated the right to make social policy."

Contending that the process has been a failure in four of the districts, he labels Prince Edward County the only success, a revealing conclusion since he admits the county practiced "massive resistance" to desegregation, closing its public schools for ten years, establishing a private academy to accommodate most of the county's white pupils. Wolters waxes rhapsodic about the academy, citing its undefeated football team, its Pep Club and Youth for Christ. With apparent approval, he quotes its headmaster, Robert Redd, as saying, "Most blacks simply do not have the ability to do quality school work. . . . We knew desegregation couldn't work because of the inherent temperamental and intellectual differences."

Finally, Wolters blames the national "failure" of school desegregation on moral deficiencies among blacks: "near-epidemic rates of alcoholism, drug addiction, venereal disease, vandalism, violence, and crime," in short "a breakdown in morality at a time of decreasing white prejudice and increasing economic opportunities for blacks."

Jennifer Hochschild has produced a far more sophisticated piece of work. An assistant professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton, she is at home in the world of ideas. Her book is at once a work of political theory and an examination of the prospects for school desegregation. Hochschild makes no effort to disguise her political agenda. "I am a child of the 1960s," she writes, "and share its mistrust of and distaste for cautious middle-class–oriented change in the face of serious, even desperate, problems. . . . My normative concern was that old chestnut, 'Why is there no socialism in the United States?' "

Her book derives its title from Gunnar Myrdal's seminal work on American race relations, published in 1944. But if Myrdal regarded racism as an inexplicable anomaly in America's liberal, democratic ethos, Hochschild sees the relationship between racism and the American system as symbiotic. And so, she contends, the cure must go far beyond tinkering at the margins of society to destroy the tangled roots of race and class privilege.

Whatever stance one takes toward her thesis, much of the argument is convincing. Most compelling, I think, is the case she makes for metropolitan desegregation. So long as the major cities of the Northeast and Midwest must halt integration at the city line, their school systems will be increasingly black. The experience in Southern communities, where school districts often embrace suburban portions of the county, demonstrates that whites are much less likely to flee desegregation in such a system. Moreover, a metropolitan approach confronts the critical issue of equity: Why should the urban poor of all races bear the burden of desegregation when suburbanites are exempt?

The difficulty with all this is the Supreme Court's 1974 ruling in *Milliken v. Bradley*, in which it overturned a Federal District Court decision that had required cross-busing between Detroit and its surrounding suburbs. Since the lower court had found de jure segregation in the city but not in the suburbs, the Supreme Court held that a metropolitan-wide order "would impose on the outlying districts, not shown to have committed any constitutional violation, a wholly impermissible remedy." Although *Milliken* does not close off all metropolitan remedies, it makes them difficult to achieve throughout the industrial North.

It is in this area of implementation that Hochschild's argument seems to go awry. At one point she suggests that metropolitan remedies could be imposed by legislative majorities, which is most unlikely since suburban representatives generally control state legislatures. Elsewhere, she seems aware that her deeply unpopular nostrums could never be enacted by democratic majorities.

Ultimately, she falls back on an explicit elitism. "Liberal democracy has always relied on elites to save it from itself," she writes. "If authoritative leaders see what is necessary to turn the semblance of democracy into real democracy, and the promise of liberal rights into their guarantee, then elitism (of a certain sort) is perfectly compatible with liberal democracy." But if, as she has argued earlier, American society

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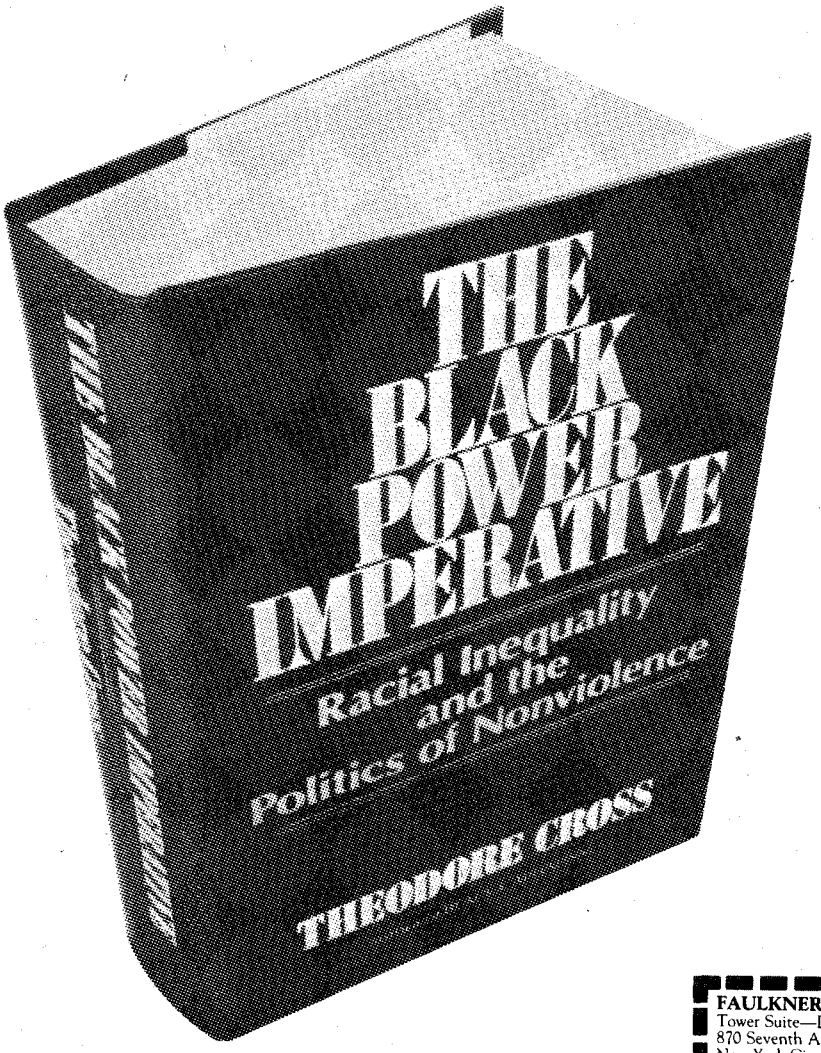

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is shot through with class and race privilege, why does she expect the very elites who most enjoy such privilege to impose this far-reaching transformation on American society?

In a liberal democracy, majority rule must be tempered by minority rights, and unelected judges are often required to uphold those constitutional guarantees. But in the long run, there is something profoundly distasteful about a populist—or socialist—solution imposed from above. Hochschild seems aware of this. She talks about two fundamental clashes between American values: "racial and cultural diversity vs. freedom of movement" and "liberalism vs. democracy."

This collision is better encapsulated in Diane Ravitch's distinction between "community" and "equality." As long ago as 1820, de Tocqueville recognized that Americans had not one but two political systems: "the one fulfilling the ordinary duties and responding to the daily and infinite calls of a community; the other circumscribed within certain limits and exercising an exceptional authority over the general interests of the country." For seventy years that delicate balance prevailed, reassuring Americans that the demands of nationalism were compatible with the intimacies of community. In the mid-nineteenth century, the revolutionary settlement broke down, the centralizing impulse breaking on the hard rock of particularism. The battle was joined in the Lincoln-Douglas debates, in which Lincoln argued that the essence of democratic government was "the equality of all men" derived from natural law, while Douglas insisted it was the "principle of popular sovereignty," the right of American communities to decide on fundamental issues, like slavery, for themselves. Ultimately force of arms held the nation together, but the tug of war between community and equality was by no means resolved. In one way or another, it has persisted.

In the flowering of 1960s idealism, Americans persuaded themselves that community and equality were not only compatible but mutually reinforcing principles. In 1964, with the nation still mourning John Kennedy's death and resolving to fulfill his interrupted promise, the Johnson Administration secured passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Economic Opportunity Act. The Civil Rights Act empowered the Federal government to cut off Federal funds to districts guilty of racial discrimination, an unprecedented role for the executive branch in the struggle for racial equality. The Economic Opportunity Act, with its guarantee of "maximum feasible participation" in community action programs, granted poor people an opportunity to control their own neighborhoods. Impelled by the same benevolent impulses, enacted by the same Congressional coalition, they were twin expressions of the nation's conscience at mid-decade.

But soon the inherent tensions between community and equality reasserted themselves. Civil rights legislation sought to override local law or custom, often equated with bigotry, in the name of a national commitment to human rights, while the poverty program encouraged "community control" as an antidote to bureaucratic centralization. Moreover, it wasn't long before disadvantaged whites saw they too could invoke, in a spirited defense of their own interests, the very doctrine designed to aid blacks.

To this day, the collision of community and equality remains a central tension in American life. It is not a choice between right and wrong but between competing values, between right and right. In her thirst for justice, Jennifer Hochschild has cast her weight entirely on the side of equality. In his commitment to the integrity of racial and ethnic groups, which in his clumsy hands sometimes verges on outright bigotry, Raymond Wolters comes down squarely on the side of community. Although Hochschild's is surely the more stirring vision, neither book does full credit to the complexity of our political tradition. What is attractive in the Hawley and Rossell volumes is a greater tolerance for ambiguity and complexity, a recognition of the countervailing claims in these great strands of American life. □

The Wrong Track

DEBORAH MEIER

KEEPING TRACK: How Schools Structure Inequality. *By Jeannie Oakes. Yale University Press. 231 pp. $21.50.*

Yet another "search for excellence" is accelerating demands for programs to benefit the "gifted and talented" at one end of the educational spectrum and the "difficult learners" at the other. In other words, more tracking! Jeannie Oakes's new book arrives just in time to let us know what tracking has actually accomplished in American education and what its impact has been on students and society.

Oakes demonstrates, with substantial evidence, that students have radically different and unequal schooling experiences depending on their race and social class. The disparity is not primarily due to differences in educational funding, parental wishes, local tradition or unequal genetic structures, as is usually claimed, but is instead the result of tracking, the sorting of children into separate "ability" groups (high, average or low).

Although Oakes uses a variety of sources to build her case, she relies most heavily on data collected from 13,719 students and their teachers in twenty-five representative high schools. This data lends powerful documentation to the argument that our school system has long had a built-in structure for maintaining inequalities based on race and class. Much of the difference in school outcomes, she argues, can be explained by what happens to students *in* schools, and much of that difference rests on tracking.

This is not a new argument, but *Keeping Track* is the most thorough effort I've yet seen to document it. Theodore Sizer's *Horace's Compromise*, based on a study of American high schools, begins by acknowledging that the major determinant in students' school experience, both curricular and extracurricular, is social class. John Goodlad, author of *A Place Called School*, a comprehensive analysis of American schooling from kindergarden through twelfth grade, makes the same point. His study is, in fact, the primary source for Oakes's data.

Despite this evidence, tracking has not been a major issue in any of the recent prestigious commission reports

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on educational reform. At first glance these reports appear to aim at undermining tracking, since most of them call for imposing uniform standards on all students. But as their recommendations for more course requirements, reduced options, more frequent use of standardized tests and stiffer promotion standards are implemented, it has become increasingly difficult to find alternatives to tracking. One of the tragic results of these recommendations has been the rise in both truancy and dropout rates among students who find themselves at the bottom of the schools' achievement (and economic) ladder. Those youngsters have been tracked out of school entirely. Meanwhile, the alarmist tone of the reports—meant to awaken the nation—has first and foremost awakened parents who have the power to insure that their children shall receive the very best (and, if possible, at public expense).

If much of Oakes's argument is reminiscent of the 1960s, we should remember that the reform efforts of the 1960s accepted tracking as a given and, in effect, mandated it by requiring that Federal resources be utilized in classrooms available only to the poor. Such Federal programs also played a major role in increasing a school's dependence on standardized test scores as a legitimate means of sorting pupils into different categories, and in contributing to the now burgeoning empire of Special Education as an accepted dumping ground for those who formerly occupied the lowest tracks. Each year, approximately 5 to 10 percent of our youngsters, variously labeled "educationally disturbed," "learning disabled," "retarded" or "emotionally disturbed," are marched off into special programs. They rarely return to the mainstream settings, and certainly not to the upper tracks in American high schools. (The demand for Special Education stems, of course, from the desperate situation of handicapped children. That it has often buttressed tracking rather than preparing students for mainstream classrooms, as it was intended to do, is a tragedy.)

One new feature of Oakes's argument is that she has directed her attention to tracking in high schools instead of concentrating on primary education. In the 1960s, even the most ardent advocates of the common, heterogeneous primary school accepted the notion that it was not possible to mix students once they

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reached high school. Many progressives dealt with the dilemma by favoring "comprehensive" high schools which were then divided into honors, general and vocational subschools, on the assumption that young people would meet in sports, student government or the school chorus. In fact, notes John Goodlad, they don't.

Oakes acknowledges that good intentions are responsible for both the rationale behind tracking and the fervently held convictions that still undergird it. Among those well-intentioned assumptions are the following:

§ Students learn better in homogeneous groups (above all, bright kids suffer when mixed with slow learners).

§ All students, including the academically weak, feel more comfortable in homogeneous groups.

§ There are fair ways to determine who belongs in which track.

§ Teaching is easier when students are academically alike.

Oakes's careful analysis of an impressive range of data leads her to conclude that not one of those assumptions is based on evidence. Not only do students not do better when they are tracked, but what they actually do is so qualitatively different from track to track that comparing their performances is deceptive. She documents her case meticulously, noting contradictory material where she found it, and acknowledges the grave problems facing schools that might seek to change.

The hundreds of tracking studies carried on over the years, she reports, point to one clear conclusion: there exists no evidence that any group (high, average or low) *"has been found to benefit consistently from being in a homogeneous group"* (emphasis in original). A few studies showed that high-track students did better in "enriched" classes set aside for bright children. However, most high track–level students did not show any measurable difference in accomplishment whether they were tracked or placed in mixed classes. Average and slow students, on the other hand, were consistently damaged by tracking in virtually all measurable areas—academic performance, self-image, attendance, behavior, participation in extracurricular activities and delinquency in and out of school. And these results have been obtained in studies that controlled for other student attributes that might confuse the findings.

It is ironic, and regrettable, that the importance of this kind of data is so widely ignored even by those whose progressive views it might be expected to advance. If proponents of egalitarian schooling can be accused of mushy-headedness and a refusal to face "hard facts," opponents of egalitarianism are even more resistant to hard evidence when it comes to tracking.

Promotional policy is another area in which hard data has been ignored by reformers in their pursuit of "excellence." Despite overwhelming evidence that "retention-in-grade" does not produce the intended beneficial effects, leaving students back in the name of excellence has recently become the law in state after state. As a strategy for keeping some students from ever getting to high school, nonpromotion may have its successes, and tracking, as Oakes demonstrates, may inadvertantly serve the same end. It would be nice to believe that Oakes's evidence on tracking will be taken more seriously than the data establishing the uselessness of nonpromotion as a method for improving school performance.

At the heart of Oakes's work is a careful documentation of the way in which students are sorted and of what goes on at each level. In addition, she looks at the data on untracked classes, a small but significant number of which exist in the sampled schools.

The tracks are never equidistant. The high and average tracks share similar goals. The low-track classes resemble neither. The higher the track, the more academic the climate: both students and teachers see the purpose of the course in terms of learning about content, learning to be critical thinkers, exercising greater independence, solving problems, analyzing, reasoning and evaluating. Low-track teachers and students agree on management goals like learning to be quiet while the teacher talks, improving study habits, being punctual, conforming to rules, getting along with one another. Relationships between students and teachers and the degree of student involvement in course work show similar patterns; though few students in any track were very engaged or involved, the lower the track the greater the passivity. Interestingly, in that small but significant sample of classes where low, average and high achievers are mixed, the classes replicate the climate and content of the average or high tracks.

Oakes provides a provocative chapter on the history of tracking, and in her later chapters makes an effort to see how her data fits into several larger theories of American education. She suggests that her evidence might support the theory of cultural reproduction put forth by, among others, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis in *Schooling in Capitalist America*. She also addresses the constitutional issues that might bear on tracking, the relationship of vocational education to tracking and the dilemmas of teaching in unmixed classes.

But the major impact of Oakes's book is its relentless, almost tedious, marshaling of data regarding the "unequal distribution of knowledge in a direction that favors the already privileged." It is, in fact, so relentless in this respect that it may not be as widely read as it deserves to be.

Perhaps we now need more anecdotal and descriptive material to go alongside this kind of work. We may need to see in vivid detail what it means for children to experience such consistently anti-intellectual and academically arid schooling year in and year out in classrooms set aside for failures. Quantitative data alone, based on school records and multiple-choice paper-and-pencil interviews, cannot, as Oakes acknowledges, explain how this kind of schooling affects both the self-esteem and the world view of its participants.

In its way, the American rhetoric of educational equality may do even more damage to a youngster's sense of self-respect than the more blatant class distinctions fostered in European working-class and lower-class schools. The belief that "you can be anything you want to be if you work hard enough" is deeply embedded in school practices and, according to Oakes's data, is deeply believed. For all the blessings of this individualist ideology, it also leaves scars on those who fail. It creates injuries of the sort Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb explored in *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. The victims, they argue, accept responsibility for their marginal status even as they complain of the injustice that has consigned them to it. They are acutely sensitive to having missed out on the "good life," which they nevertheless view as the reward for individual achievement rather than collective social action. No wonder, then, that the American left has had such difficulty building a progressive agenda for

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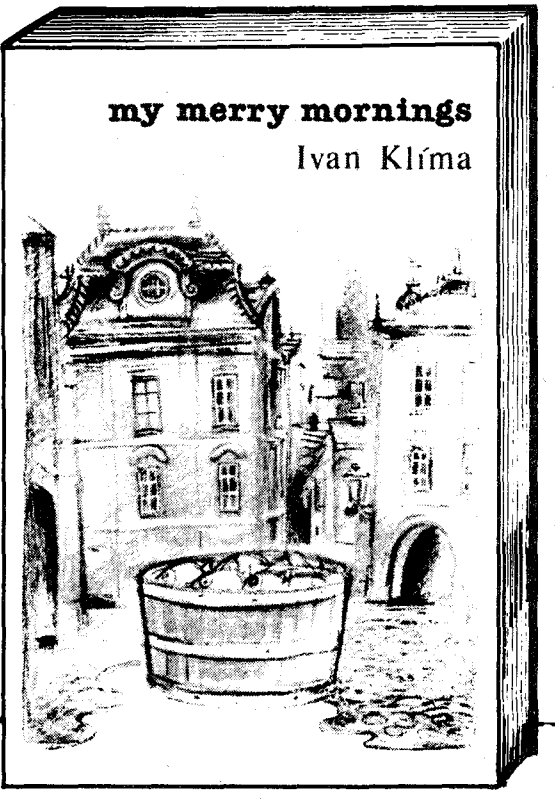

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reform: twelve years of feeling unworthy to join the "good life" of the more successful students in school does little to bolster confidence in the worth of one's family, friends and social class.

The ability of American educational rhetoric to mask the way that schooling affects a person's sense of worth as a member of any larger community may be its most insidious element. Democratic institutions require accepting responsibility both for oneself and for the honor and well-being of a larger group. That's not an easy balance, and it hardly ever operates without tensions. For it to occur one must see oneself as belonging to a valued community. It is this opportunity for membership that tracking denies to at least one group of students.

By restricting access to excellence in schools, tracking limits the economic and social mobility of many young people. It also guarantees that one group of our citizens will spend their formative years in an environment that systematically deprives them of publicly acceptable ways to make a contribution to or be valued by their community. This is hardly equity. Worse, it is hardly appropriate to an education for democratic life.

"There is every reason to believe," concludes Oakes, that "there are essential, intrinsic qualities in the values and processes that promote equity" that also "result in the highest levels of achievement." This book provides important evidence in defense of this central and critical democratic belief. □

Father Knows Best

SUE M. HALPERN

THE SCHOOLS WE DESERVE: Reflections on the Educational Crises of Our Time. *By Diane Ravitch. Basic Books. 337 pp. $19.95.*

CHALLENGE TO AMERICAN SCHOOLS: The Case for Standards and Values. *Edited by John H. Bunzel. Oxford University Press. 248 pp. $19.95.*

Excellence, once the honorific of monarchs, is now the shibboleth of America's educational royalists. For them, academic standardization is king, and pedantry noble. Reciting the statistics of our national intellectual demise with the grimness of a body count—that, for instance, between 1964 and 1975 there was a steady drop in SAT scores or that 13 percent of all 17-year-olds are functionally illiterate—they identify the perpetrator in what they characterize as the liberal school reforms of the past two decades. These, they argue in books like Diane Ravitch's *The Schools We Deserve* and John Bunzel's *Challenge to American Schools*, have caused curricular anarchy, plummeting rates of achievement, low academic expectations, grade inflation and the decay of adult authority. More fundamentally, to paraphrase the title of the report of the Reagan Administration's bipartisan National Commission on Excellence in Education (N.C.E.E.), they have put the "nation at risk" of economic atrophy, technological inferiority, cultural poverty and strategic ineptitude. If the damage is not to be irrevocable, these critics contend, we must commit ourselves to quality education through the restoration of a rigorous, uniform high-school curriculum to be mastered by all public school students before they are allowed to graduate.

Diane Ravitch, an adjunct professor at Columbia University's Teachers College and the author of three earlier books about American education, is an exemplar of what has come to be known as the "excellence movement." Retrograde by design, the movement's advocacy of curricular requirements (four years of English, three each of math, science and social studies and two of a foreign language), of enforceable and enforced disciplinary codes and of substantive homework assignments recalls a more innocent age, one before *Father Knows Best* was a rerun at 3 A.M. It is appropriate, then, that like the movement itself, Ravitch's latest book, a collecton of her published articles, simply repackages old ideas.

Still, while the routine ingredients of conservative faith can be found in her objections to bilingual education, racial quotas and certain desegregation efforts, Ravitch now inclines toward the hetero-

Sue M. Halpern recently received a doctorate in politics from Oxford University.

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doxy of neoconservatism. What is new about her pedagogical position is its justification of "excellence" as equity. As she sees it, the failure to endow every high school student with an "academic" education is inherently unfair. "It is difficult for me to understand," she writes, "how a publicly supported school can justify providing one group of children with the equivalent of a prep school experience [and] another group with training for a trade." Equality, it seems, means elitism for all.

Traditionally, the appeal to equity has been a liberal standard, wielded in the name of such practices as affirmative action, bilingual education and open admissions. Ravitch has not stolen this flag unwittingly. She waves it in the face of unnamed "liberal reformers," challenging them to prove that their conception of equity is more egalitarian than hers. While she does not deny that liberal policies greatly expanded the educational opportunities of groups historically discriminated against, she suggests that equal access only provides the illusion of equality, not the thing itself. The key to true educational equality—the mastery of a standard corpus of knowledge—has been made obsolete as liberal policies sought to equalize educational attainment (years of schooling) without regard to the quality of education. Then, according to Ravitch:

> As the consensus fell [due to demand for equity] the notion of a common curriculum was undermined. To maintain student interest, courses in traditional subjects were fragmented into minicourses, particularly in the humanistic areas like history and the related subjects like

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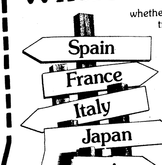

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Since students who graduate from a high school unable to read must have ntered it the same way, it is disappoint- g that only one brief essay of the enty-one included here concerns ele- ntary education. In that essay, inging Literature and History Back lementary Schools," Ravitch notes in its 1983 report, *A Nation at* the N.C.E.E. "almost entirely ig- ' elementary education, and by ing this lacuna, she not only ex- ar similar neglect but inadvert- eals something of the origin of dealized agenda for public ols:

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America's educational canker is so pervasive, it can be so easily eradicated by the reforms she advocates. More critical, she does not stop to consider the likely consequences of these reforms—increased rates of illiteracy, attrition and unemployment. Even when she acknowledges that "some will take longer to achieve mastery [of the curriculum] than others," she does not pause to worry if her plan for the attainment of excellence might prove to be such a disincentive to those slower youths that they might give up e together. Finally, in ignoring the p sible effects of a uniform curricu on the nation's troubled high scl Ravitch leaves great doubt that conception of excellence was the Darwinian schools we w where the weak are left beh be the schools we deserve.

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> It is an effort that must begin at the beginning. It must make use of varied experiments *in the* last quarter

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May 25, 1985

Challenge to American Education not simply as plans for the construction of classrooms but as blueprints for the rendering of society.

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work, he said. He's still very worried about them, but not nervous. He used to be. Recent ... come near him now. I quiver when I ... he's so open on the computer. He's so ... kids ask him for help and he ... about giving ... ahead. He went ... obliging. Thought, I'm exactly ... were preprimer ... ideas. It needs ... stuff ... sheets stuck. Not ... Gloria, angry beau ... got messed up ... stomped giggled ... read with the ... ugly ... and a ... good perfec... friend, ... H...

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> As requirements fell [due to demand for access], the notion of a common curriculum was undermined. To maintain student interest, courses in traditional subjects were fragmented into electives and mini-courses, particularly in the "soft," humanistic areas like English and history, and the requirements in the "hard" subjects like mathematics, science, and foreign language were eased or eliminated.

Curricular atomization is the *primum mobile* in Ravitch's domino theory of America's intellectual fall. It causes test scores to plunge, skills to be deficient, culture to be uncultivated and, farther down the line, Japanese imports to crowd U.S. highways. Yet, while such linear connections are comforting, since they suggest that the elimination of the first cause eliminates the problem, and while they may seem so logical as to be determinate, their veracity is not axiomatic. Nor does Ravitch prove it to be. It is not at all obvious, for example, that knowing or not knowing binomial nomenclature or the history of the House

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Since students who graduate from a high school unable to read must have entered it the same way, it is disappointing that only one brief essay of the twenty-one included here concerns elementary education. In that essay, "Bringing Literature and History Back to Elementary Schools," Ravitch notes that in its 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, the N.C.E.E. "almost entirely ignored" elementary education, and by dismissing this lacuna, she not only excuses her similar neglect but inadvertently reveals something of the origin of her own idealized agenda for public high schools:

> Perhaps the major reason so little attention has been paid to elementary schools is that there is general consensus that the significant problems of the schools begin after the sixth grade. After all, unlike high schools, the elementary schools offer everyone a fairly common curriculum and they are not plagued by absenteeism or disciplinary problems.

The ligatures of logic that link Ravitch's arguments are not altogether binding. The most serious breaches issue from what she fails to think about, not what she thinks about badly. She never ponders, for instance, why, if America's educational canker is so pervasive, it can be so easily eradicated by the reforms she advocates. More critical, she does not stop to consider the likely consequences of these reforms—increased rates of illiteracy, attrition and unemployment. Even when she acknowledges that "some will take longer to achieve mastery [of the curriculum] than others," she does not pause to worry if her plan for the attainment of excellence might prove to be such a disincentive to those slower youths that they might give up altogether. Finally, in ignoring the possible effects of a uniform curriculum on the nation's troubled high schools, Ravitch leaves great doubt that if her conception of excellence was applied, the Darwinian schools we would get, where the weak are left behind, would be the schools we deserve.

In "The Problem With Competence," one of the eleven essays in *Challenge to American Schools*, Nathan Glazer answers some of the questions that Diane Ravitch does not raise. He is disturbed by the persistent pattern of black underachievement as measured by such objective criteria as high-school exit exams and the Law School Admission Test. Attacking or eliminating such tests, Glazer contends, is beside the point, since this does not address, let alone ameliorate, the more compelling problem of cognitive underdevelopment. Instead, Glazer proposes that the government undertake a large-scale initiative to raise the educational achievement levels of black Americans:

> It is an effort that must begin at the beginning. It must make use of all the varied experiments that we have tried in the last twenty years. . . . It requires undoubtedly greater financial resources for the education of blacks. . . . How to spend those resources is not a simple matter: a mere across-the-board increase does not assure any improvement. One could raise teachers' salaries across-the-board with no change . . . in the achievement of black children.

What is clear to Glazer, however, is that the money must be spent on elementary education, that "by the time high school is reached, the foundations for further education have been set or not."

Compared with the wishfulness of the excellence proponents, Glazer's prosaic realism appears profound. Furthermore, it is indicative of the rhetorical obscurantism pervading much of the education debate that what is remarkable about his conclusion is that it is not so evident as to be unremarkable. Educators who protest the imposition of a standard academic curriculum as a prerequisite of graduation

> are right because they know it is out of the question for many of the students who enter their high schools conceivably to undertake studies for which they have no preparation, of which they have no understanding, for which they have no incentive.

Glazer distances himself from the excellence movement, so it is fitting that his essay is the last in a collection where the first, "Why the Schools May Not Improve Much," by Joseph Adelson, defends it. Adelson sees enemies of excellence everywhere—in the universities, in the press, in the bureaucracy, in teachers' lunchrooms. It is toward them that he directs his fire. Adelson's is a disturbing, ad hominem assault. The opponents of "excellence," he suggests, are motivated by ideology; they lurch on reflexive knees. Or they have careers to protect. Or they are deceived. Of their actual objections he says very little, implying that their criticisms have no substance. Adelson sets up straw men, burns them and sifts their ashes. He equates opposition to the excellence movement with opposition to excellence generally. He does not allow that those who do not follow his prescriptions can be serious about remedying the debilities of American education.

As the disparity between Adelson's and Glazer's essays intimates, *Challenge to American Schools* is a diverse and uneven collection. With all its contributors positioned on the right, the book tends toward ideological tropism. This is mitigated to an extent by the format; the authors address discrete subjects, such as the role of the family in the educational process or the future of teachers' unions, so they do not often speak to the same issues. When they do, they do not automatically articulate the same opinion.

More often than not, however, these pieces are, if not philosophically congruent, then contiguous. Not surprisingly, distrust of government is a common disposition. It informs Barbara Lerner's article, "Our Black-Robed School Board," in which she despairs of the way that color-conscious judicial activism bears on the educational enter-

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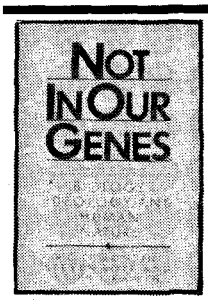

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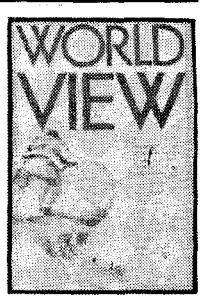

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prise. It also underwrites J. Myron Atkin's lament about federally legislated educational correctives in "Changing Our Thinking About Educational Change." Atkin, Dean of Stanford's School of Education, cites the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, which mandates classroom mainstreaming of disabled students, as an egregrious example of the incapacity of "global" policies to respond to local conditions.

Robert B. Hawkins Jr., president of the Sequoia Institute, is similarly concerned with the responsiveness of educational policies and practices to local needs. His advocacy of both the deconsolidation of school districts and citizen participation in the educational policy-making process is reminiscent of the demands for community control that came out of Ocean Hill-Brownsville and other ghetto neighborhoods in the mid-1960s. In Hawkins's essay, "Strategy for Revitalizing Public Education," the debate over educational reform appears to come full circle. But unlike the arguments put forth in the 1960s, Hawkins's is more libertarian than communitarian, based not on racial or ethnic self-determination but on the sovereignty of the individual.

As part of their proposals for reform, Hawkins, Atkin, Chester E. Finn Jr. and others recommend that teachers be given a greater say in the determination of educational policy. Unfortunately, *Challenge to American Schools* is one more forum where the teacher's voice is not heard. Not one of its contributors is a schoolteacher or administrator; all are university professors or professional educational consultants. Paradoxically, a number of conservative critics, including Ravitch, Adelson and Lerner, decry the power of "professional educationists" who, from enclaves far removed from the classroom, direct the course of American education. These same critics, however, do not question the legitimacy of their own attempts to modify that direction. They impeach the liberalism of the policy-makers, while disregarding their own ideological proclivities.

One suspects that they know the truth: that the public education debate is not just political, a matter of choosing sides, but that it is *about* politics, how we live with one another. Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Jefferson and other political philosophers teach us this. It is no coincidence that their writings on politics are devoted to the education of citizens. From them we must learn to think as architects, seeing books like *The Schools We Deserve* and *Challenge to American Education* not simply as plans for the construction of classrooms but as blueprints for the rendering of society. □

Where the Action Is

ALICE SELETSKY

What I like best about teaching is that there are no easy answers—to anything. Even after twenty-five years, I have to keep wondering, tinkering, changing my mind, learning. There are always more questions than answers and very few fixed points along the way where I can say: I know this thing; I have the answers; I understand all there is to know about this particular child, or that troublesome group in the corner; I know exactly how to teach long division to this one and help that one over some humps in reading. Uncertainties, which are the source of so much concern and frustration, are the very elements that make teaching and learning such a lively business.

At the heart of my interest are questions about how and what children learn in the small but complicated world of the classroom, and what my role is in all that; how they experience the world and make sense of it; how they build friendships and create small social communities; how they settle for themselves the questions of meaning and value; and how, finally, all that gets articulated through the many different things we do all day.

Each year there are about thirty-two fifth- and sixth-grade children in my classroom at Central Park East, a public elementary school in New York City, one of a network of alternative schools in District Four. A typical morning, as recorded in my school journal, begins this way (names and some details have been changed to preserve anonymity):

> Much better morning than we've had for a long time—probably because I changed the schedule around. That makes the third time this year. Something's not quite right, but I can't figure out what. Not the right tempo, somehow; not enough energy or ???
>
> Worked with Lawrence on prime numbers. (He couldn't do the homework, he said.) He's still very worried about math, but not as nervous as he used to be—doesn't quiver when I come near him now. It's helped that he's so expert on the computer; lots of kids ask him for help, and he's so nice about giving it—always patient and obliging. Thought all odd numbers were primes; doesn't exactly understand factoring; does it mechanically and then gets stuck. Not sure exactly what happens—have to watch more closely tomorrow.
>
> Gloria, angry because her painting "got messed up," threw it away and stomped around a bit. Asked her to read with me, and she did it quite willingly—not the usual grumps and groans. Read a long story—one of the few she's attempted this year. Got it almost perfect, but much seemed memorized. Said she'd been reading it at home. *Hates* to let anyone see how much she can't do; hates to be corrected. I don't know how else to help her except to keep reassuring. Asked if she could do "experiments" and I promised to set some up for her tomorrow.
>
> Juanita showed me the illustrations for her story. Gorgeous. Real talent for drawing and a wonderful writer. Story needs editing; made an appointment to do it at lunchtime so we can work without interruptions.
>
> A group, led by Josie, wants to do a dramatization of *Bridge to Terabithia*. Said she'd started writing the script at home. I suggested they pick one scene and work on it improvisationally. They want only to work together—Mona, Georgianna, Josie—no boys. Started to discuss it but Jaime came to ask me to help him find a picture of a Japanese warrior. (Didn't think to ask what he needs that for; what's he working on? Must check tomorrow.) Asked the girls if we could discuss the boy/girl issue at class meeting, but they said no. There's a lot going on, I think, about who likes who, etc., but all subterranean. Needs thinking about.
>
> Glenn angry because somebody spoiled his map—looks like they stepped on it, and he refuses to do it over. I flashed the lights and launched

Alice Seletsky teaches fifth and sixth grade at Central Park East School.

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into lecture #99 about respect for each other's work, etc., but right in the middle of it, a whole bunch of kids left to go to violin.

We live and work together in a self-contained classroom which is designed to support children's diverse interests and abilities, provide opportunities for social and intellectual growth and encourage learning through engagement with a variety of books and materials and with one another. The room is arranged so that different kinds of work can go on: painting, model making, cooking, science, math, writing, reading, computer, filmmaking, drama. Some of these take place in the classroom, others in the hallway outside and still others in the unused classroom next door. Some activities are related to a curriculum theme; others reflect the interests of particular children. During the morning work period, most children engage in one or more of these activities; afternoons are devoted to academic work: writing, math, class discussions, independent study projects. Some of the children participate in other school programs: studying violin or recorder, singing in the chorus, working with specialists in art or pottery, or with the resource room teacher. My job is to explain, assist, urge, instruct, organize, plan, manage, supply and do anything else that will support teaching and learning.

All the good teachers I know work hard, whether they do it informally, as I do, or in more traditional ways. Our concerns are much the same: to help children develop their powers of thought and imagination and grow into thoughtful, responsible, resourceful human beings. It's a monumental job when you think about it—being responsible for all these young lives, year after year—and most of us have to do it with far too many children in small, poorly designed classrooms. And always, always with the pressure of time. Last year there were thirty-four children in my class. It meant everyone working elbow to elbow with few spaces for quiet work or thoughtful conversations. It also meant that there were few opportunities for me to work with individual kids in unhurried, uninterrupted ways. To help a youngster puzzle out some difficulty with a mathematical concept, for example, requires some talking, some exploration of misconceptions and some experimenting with possibilities. I'd like kids to feel challenged by problems, to have the sense that almost anything is solvable, given enough time and attention. In order to build that sense and to help with the figuring out, I have to feel free to observe and think, gather my wits and focus my attention on *this one thing*. Only schoolteachers and mothers of eleven children, all under the age of 6, understand how hard it can be when so many need so much all at the same time. It's unrelenting. The absorption with kids doesn't start and stop within the limits of the official school day. It's there during the trips to and from school, at the dinner table, on weekends and holidays; a teacher friend sometimes dreams about the block area or the sand table in his classroom.

Whatever the frustrations and difficulties, the classroom can be an exciting, lively corner of the world. I teach the way I do because I believe it works and because it allows me to be a participant, sharing with kids many of the things I value and enjoy: putting on plays; doing many different kinds of art; writing stories and poems; making models of objects and worlds both real and imagined; talking about books and authors, history and mythology, heroes and villains, maps and stars and a hundred other things. I believe I come to know children more fully through studying their works; and they begin to know themselves through producing them:

> I'm trying to make the light shine on the leaves, Eddie said about his painting. I can't get it. I put yellow paint, but that didn't work. I made streaks—like yellow lines. That didn't work either. I don't know how they do that—how they make it look like light.

> Mindy was writing a story about how the world began. (We had been reading creation myths.) I asked her to read some of it to the kids sitting at her table. In the beginning was a rock, she began. Somebody said, it can't start from a rock. A rock's not living. It doesn't have to be, Mindy said. Nothing's alive yet if it's just the beginning. Anyway, it's *my* story; I can write it any way I want to. Anyway, rocks are alive, said Greg. They used to be alive. They're made from dead trees—like fossils. Everything is matter, right? Molecules and all that. That means they're alive.

> Clive and Brendan want to make an animated film—a war movie. They described the plot. Much gory detail,

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lots of blood and thunder. I said I didn't like the idea; war is terrible; maybe they should make an anti-war movie. Long discussion, with the boys earnestly explaining their ideas, taking it all seriously. Clive's notion is that war is only bad when the good guys lose, because they're fighting (defending?) what's right. Brendan said war is terrible because innocent people get killed, often not knowing what the war was about.

Writing curriculum is another source of satisfaction, and I try to do something new every year. It gives me the opportunity to pursue topics I particularly like and to share my knowledge of mythology, ancient Greece, life in the Bronze Age in Britain. I also get to learn new things. When I chose *The King and I* as last year's class play, the study of Southeast Asia seemed a natural choice for the curriculum theme. In preparation I had to browse in bookstores and the 42nd Street library, and my research yielded, among other things, the diary of an American missionary who printed the first books in the Thai alphabet. Useful knowledge? Who knows. Fun? You bet.

It's exciting to think about teaching and learning in this way but I also have to give some thought to those children, always a few in each group, who hate the whole topic, find it unspeakably boring and insist on doing something entirely different.

It wasn't always this way. As a beginning teacher, I didn't give much thought to what teaching was about. I became a per diem substitute in the Bronx, intending to stay just long enough for my daughters to grow up enough to free me to find my *real* life's work. While I had neither the inclination nor the training to be a teacher, "subbing" was a good choice for a temporary job: the hours were short; I could choose schools close to home; and I need only work when it was convenient. By the time I took a fourth-grade class full time, several years later, I was convinced there had to be some *right way* to teach; some set of sure-fire methods which, with proper and industrious application, would turn each child into a fluent reader, an accomplished mathematician and a wise, affectionate, capable young person.

So I tried anything that came my way. It was old math one year and new math the next. I learned about behavior modification and tried that for a while, not with the recommended raisins and M&M's but with free time at the end of the day for the worthy ones and boring spelling words for the unmodified. "Discovery" was popular one year, and I spent many hours writing lesson plans designed to help children discover things like the relationship between addition and multiplication. There wasn't a single Eureka.

I came into teaching at a time and in a place where the staff was composed largely of women—excellent women, many of them, traditional teachers who communicated a serious sense of purpose and genuine commitment. They couldn't teach me about the joy of teaching, but they were good, old-fashioned models, and from them I learned how to do some useful things: write lesson plans and teach from them; give spelling and arithmetic tests; train children to sit still, walk in lines and perform little folk dances wearing crepe-paper sashes or flowered headbands. I was serious about teaching, worried about kids who were having problems and eager for every child to succeed—which meant doing well on standardized tests, following the rules, being "motivated." I was, in short, a traditional teacher, like those around me.

There are greater rewards in the way I work now but much less certainty. A couple of years ago, I tried to list in my school journal every single thing I did in the course of a particular morning. It was an effort to reassure myself that I was actually accomplishing something. It's not always easy to be sure. I know that I work hard, get to school at 7:30 and rarely leave before 4, but I can't always reckon up precisely what I've done and what it all means. In tne old days, I wrote daily lesson plans and made big, red checks in the plan book each time I finished a lesson. It was satisfying to turn those pages and see the checks, week after week. There were other concrete ways I could judge: children's responses to my questions in class and their performances on tests. If I had one of the top classes, kids did well and I was reassured; if I was assigned to one of the less able groups, where there seemed to be little change from year to year, I didn't have to blame myself. I was comforted by the fact that I'd done the best I could. Those red checks confirmed it.

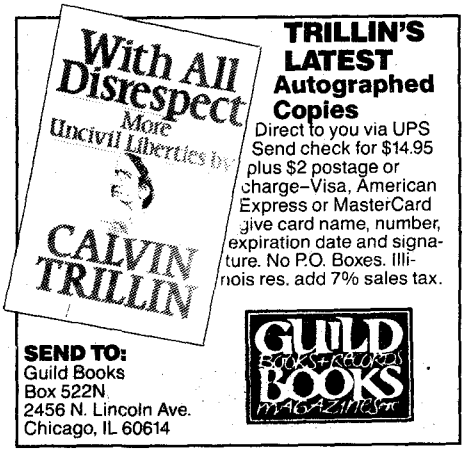
I don't have those red checks any more, and teaching is no longer a matter of doing lessons, asking simple questions and administering tests. How am I to describe successful teaching and learning? Can I take credit for those many cheerful, curious, imaginative, industrious kids who are challenged and excited by learning and move right along, asking questions, making choices, exploring the world? What can I point to and say, I helped do that, helped make it possible for that child to develop the best that was within? How do I answer the real questions: Have I done a good job? the right job? the best job? Reassurance takes different forms and often comes in small ways:

> Nina read her first long, difficult book, struggling with it for weeks. I *love* Cadie Woodlawn, she said. You got another one like that?
>
> Bobby told me he learned how to do long division—could teach other kids who were having problems. His grandmother showed him her way. It's old-fashioned, he said, but I think it works.
>
> Jimmy showed up this morning—a gigantic person—towering over me. Was he ever only 4 feet tall? Gave that wonderful grin and a big hug and told the kids not to give me a hard time. You appreciate her later on in life, he said.

But just as often, there are criticisms:

> Virginia called me last night. (She had just started seventh grade.) Tearful, angry, accusing. How come you didn't teach me the states, Alice? Everybody in my class knows them but me!
>
> Had a conference with Jay's father. Shakespeare! He doesn't need Shakespeare. You're wasting his time with that. He's having trouble because you don't know how to teach him.

Perhaps I'm especially sensitive to all this because I'm the one at the end of the line—the last teacher they have before going out into the great world of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junior high school. And I can't help wondering and worrying if they're really prepared for everything that's coming: Do they know enough? Will the teachers think them as special and wonderful as I've found them to be? And the perpetual question in the back of my mind is, Have I failed them in some way?

All teachers work with some degree of uncertainty. It's one of the reasons there are so many prescriptive, teacher-proof, "instructionally effective," programmed, predigested schemes, some of them computerized and almost all designed to demonstrate what kids have and have not "learned." I don't believe they reduce uncertainty by very much, and the price we pay is enormous: real knowledge gets reduced into bits and bytes and Gradgrindian "facts, facts, facts, Sir!" Teachers mistrust their intuition and experience, and parents and children come to believe that the only things worth knowing are what's measured on a test. The pressures of testing lead to practices that are pernicious and harmful but hard to resist as the test date looms closer and the sense of urgency, for both teachers and kids, grows. I hate to hear myself teaching a youngster something I know he/she isn't ready for, simply because it's going to be on a test; or to find myself comparing one child to another, using a standard of achievement I know is ambiguous and artificial.

Two things have made it a little more comfortable to live with the doubt and uncertainty: I firmly believe that children, like grown-ups, learn a remarkable number of things, all on their own and often when nobody's looking; and I'm able to base my teaching practice on my beliefs because I work in a school where inquiry is encouraged, diversity valued and kids and teachers free to say, I'm not sure, I don't quite understand, I don't know.

Central Park East is not a typical elementary school, though in certain ways we're much like others in the city. Our building is large, old and somewhat run-down; classes have too many children and too few supplies; and our students reflect a broad range of economic, social and ethnic diversity, somewhat weighted in the direction of low-income minority children. We give mandated tests and adhere to city-wide promotional policies.

But there are clear and important differences. We are smaller than many elementary schools, with a student body of about 250. We offer parents the choice of a very particular kind of education, based on a philosophy that has developed over eleven years. And we accept virtually every child who applies. The staff, each of whom has chosen to work at C.P.E., is made up of hard-working, strongly individualistic, thoughtful adults. We administer standardized tests but try to do it reasonably, working with the older students on test-taking skills and interpreting the results to parents and children in ways that make the most sense and do the least harm.

What gives us our special character and identity as a school has to do with three additional factors: the educational and administrative leadership exercised by our director; the autonomy we have in many aspects of our school lives; and our shared vision of what a good school for children should be.

A school that values collectivity and supports teacher autonomy doesn't always run smoothly. There are issues that can only be resolved by discussions, disagreements and compromises—a process which must be done repeatedly for those particularly tangled questions that don't yield easily to solution. We are, however, remarkably free of the mindless tasks, petty humiliations and pedagogic constraints which some educational institutions systematically and thoughtlessly impose on staff, children and parents. At our regular staff meetings, we discuss school policies and practices, curriculum problems and lunchroom schedules, parents' concerns and school reports—all the large and small matters bearing on the quality and character of school life. We also think it essential to hold regular staff reviews, discussions about individual children or particular groups or some aspect of teaching practice. Of course it means taking precious hours from a crowded day, and of course we grumble about it from time to time. But decisions arrived at collectively empower each staff member and create a sense of shared responsibility for one another and for the school. The relationships we've built enable us to articulate our vision of what a school should be and persuade parents and children that we're to be trusted to do the job the best way we can.

It's a little embarrassing to talk openly of love of teaching—this difficult, demanding, exhilarating, absorbing work I've done for so long. But it's the best explanation I can offer, after twenty-five years as a teacher, for the peculiar compulsion I have to continue doing it until some Great Pedagogic Hand flicks the lights on and off and tells me it's *really* time to stop. □

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Imprinting the Kids

THEODORE R. SIZER

FOR OUR CHILDREN: A Different Approach to Public Education. *By Frank Macchiarola and Thomas Hauser. Continuum. 177 pp. $11.95.*

"This is a book about children," we are told. But it isn't. It is a book about bureaucracy, more particularly, about the bureaucracy of school systems. We must make these systems work, the authors tell us, and the way to do that is to set standards and hold the schools to them: design the product precisely, measure the school's performance against the prescriptions and penalize those schools that fail.

Billed as "a different approach to public education," *For Our Children* is hardly that, since it accepts without question the basic assumptions and structures of the existing system. It proposes only that we put more heat on these time-honored assumptions and structures. In the background one can hear the faint strains of a very old tune about efficient school "management." Indeed there is a great deal that is musty here. The authors' approach varies little, even in its rhetoric, from that espoused by John Franklin Bobbitt in 1913. In his immensely influential *The Supervision of City Schools: Some General Principles*, Bobbitt set forth a series of directives:

> Define qualitative and quantitative standards. . . . As [the child] passes through . . . definite quantitative and qualitative standards must be determined. . . . Incentives must be placed before the workers so as to stimulate the output on their part.

In short, push the existing system harder. Be clear on desired output. Insist that inputs are judiciously deployed. Reward the best workers. Be demanding. Hold folks "accountable."

No recent book has disappointed me more than *For Our Children*, because Frank Macchiarola is a friend and an advocate of better schools, a man as passionate on behalf of youngsters as he is politically aggressive. As chancellor of the New York City school system from 1978 to 1983, he asked tough questions and rattled bureaucratic cages. Many of his escapades—such as appointing himself acting principal of a city high school for several weeks—afforded him an unusually close look at school problems while attracting some useful publicity for his office. He was a truth teller in a city where distortions and hype are epidemic. But it was the questions Macchiarola asked that were and are at the heart of the matter: Why can't those children learn? Is there any reason in the world why we should not insist that all our children learn?

In this book, Macchiarola and Hauser argue quite properly that we must insist that children *can* learn and that if they don't learn it's our fault. This generous view of youngsters prompts the reader to look carefully at the authors' understanding of children and childhood. They follow John Dewey in describing students as the workers in schools, the "producers." Teachers are "managers of classroom instruction." It is here that the reader first becomes skeptical. Do the authors mean managers of student self-instruction? Or do they mean managers of the adults' plan to instruct the students? One increasingly suspects the latter.

We read on: children are "unprotected people. They are undeveloped and insecure, innocent and pure, badly in need of support from their elders." At the same time, children "aren't stupid. They understand the difference between what is promised and what is delivered." Children have varied needs and require a "variety of programs." However, it all boils down, the authors tell us, to getting the kids to perform:

> As for student bodies at large, basic competency examinations are one way of imposing minimum standards and targeting areas where further instruction is necessary. These exams should be based upon a standard curriculum, and that curriculum must be adhered to.

Compare that to Bobbitt:

> Management must determine the order and sequence of all of the various processes through which the raw material or the partially developed product shall pass, in order to bring about the greatest possible effectiveness and economy; and it must see that the raw material or partially finished product is actually passed on from process to process, from worker to worker, in the manner that is most effective and most economical.

Set the goals, prescribe the means, set up promotional gates, move the kid-products along. We find the school principal to be a foreman, who "must constantly visit classes, observe teachers, and evaluate their performance." These are the metaphors of 1913, even of Frederick's Prussia, hardly appropriate to the image of the blameless, pure and innocent child. They are instead metaphors of child-as-instrument, children as important goods to be systematically processed. (My rhetoric here is Bobbitt's; it is harsh but, alas, accurate.)

Of course the inescapable facts are that children differ, that they learn and grow and dream in different ways at different times. A system that puts a teacher in charge of 175 adolescents—the rule in Macchiarola's New York City public high schools—allows a teacher little time for the work with individual students that is essential if schools are to be effective. The strictly age-graded, standardized factory method didn't work for the schools that followed Bobbitt, and it certainly won't work now. When a system is highly centralized and driven by top-down regulations, as is the case in New York City, it inevitably sputters.

Six-year-olds and 16-year-olds are not much alike, and a system that serves one group well may serve another poorly. Nowhere do Macchiarola and Hauser advocate fundamentally different approaches to the teaching of younger and older students. Threat ("You won't be promoted") is a stunningly inefficient device to get anyone of any age to learn. More useful devices are the sorts of subtle incentives that make learning possible. A system in which teachers do more than three-quarters of the talking in class and in which memory/recall work is rewarded above all else is a system that does not prepare any child to live in and to enrich the complex society and economy he or she will eventually enter.

Virtually nothing good can be said about the factory model for schools except that it is hoary with age and still commands respect. If one is a romantic critic, one says it dehumanizes children.

Theodore R. Sizer is the author of Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School *(Houghton Mifflin), chairman of the education department at Brown University and chairman of the Coalition of Essential Schools.*

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If one is a hard-nosed critic, one finds it astonishingly inefficient. The fact that many kids endure it is no argument in its favor. Would they not have flourished if we had arranged their education more sensibly and sensitively?

Alas, such issues never arise in *For Our Children*, even though Macchiarola and Hauser must have opinions about them. Nowhere in the book is there a hint that the mechanisms of schooling, the conditions of learning and teaching, might be seriously awry. We must simply take the existing system and try to get it to be more effective.

But who is to put moxie into this old system? Not the educators. Macchiarola and Hauser tell us, "Real reform for education cannot come from within the educational establishment." Not local school districts: "There are too many of them." Without any guidance from the authors, one can only guess that they ultimately expect the states to drive the schools. The idea that former chancellor Macchiarola thinks that Albany knows more about Brooklyn's schoolchildren than Brooklyn is unexpected.

In sum, we have a book that ignores the devastating realities of the misdesign and cruelty, however unintended, of the American public school, a book that ignores the diversity of our school-age citizens and puts them in the hands of those who are far removed from their needs. And all this, praise God, in the name of our children.

"Education, by definition, is conservative. It is designed to preserve the best of the past and imprint those qualities upon the future." That is Macchiarola and Hauser's vision. Who decides what is the best of the past? Does history show that state governments are especially apt at this task? Where is there room for dissent, for minority views? Sure, we all can agree on the need for literacy, but who decides the content of high-school biology, literature and social studies? Do enough of us agree on that to justify a "standard curriculum"?

Are the "best ideas" then to be *imprinted* on young minds? Does the metaphor of imprinting square with either behavioral science (barely) or with democracy? (One hundred and fifty years ago Dr. Benjamin Rush urged the schools to build "republican machines" out of their students, but few responsible voices have done so since.) Can families to some significant degree shape the ideas that their children encounter? Or are parents merely to provide "input" into academic power structures?

Yes, children must learn to read, write, cipher, think clearly. But their minds must be liberated, not imprinted. They must have the capacity even to challenge a society that compels their attendance in ill-designed, patronizing, inefficient and often cruel institutions.

Macchiarola's admirers can only hope that he has temporarily wandered into the trendy cul-de-sac represented by this book's authoritarian strategy. We trust that he will look at the children again, in all their diversity, angularity, imagination. We can hope that he will give up on imprinting as a strategy for learning. Youngsters require more complicated, more subtle and above all more democratic prescriptions than those we see in *For Our Children*. If we truly want our children to learn, we will have to challenge the status quo deeply and fearlessly. Frank Macchiarola is just the kind of courageous person who could lead such an effort. That knowledge makes my disappointment in this book so much keener. □

Guess Again

NINA BARRETT

NONE OF THE ABOVE: Behind the Myth of Scholastic Aptitude. *By David Owen. Houghton Mifflin. 318 pp. $16.95.*

Calvin Trillin once observed, "When someone reaches middle age, people he knows begin to get put in charge of things, and knowing what he knows about the people who are being put in charge of things scares the hell out of him." Anyone who grew up, as I did, without questioning the Educational Testing Service's authority to measure his or her intellectual net worth in a three-digit number is liable to experience such a crisis of faith while reading David Owen's *None of the Above*. In case you've forgotten, E.T.S. is America's largest standardized testing company, the place that brings us the SATs, the PSATs, the SSATs, the LSATs, the GREs and more.

Owen is well aware of the debate over I.Q. and aptitude tests that has been smoldering in educational circles for years. Because he is also aware that the culture of testing remains impervious to the most persuasive intellectual arguments against it he has devised a different sort of attack—a journalistic foray into the methods and motives of the company behind the tests, which should prove gratifying to oppressed test takers everywhere and useful to those who want more ammunition for getting rid of the tests.

The good reputation that E.T.S. enjoys is based on a number of assumptions which Owen delights in disproving. For instance, many people assume that because the company lists its address as Princeton, New Jersey, it has some connection with Princeton University. It doesn't. In fact, it isn't even located in the heart of Princeton but sits nearby in Lawrence Township.

A lot of people also believe that E.T.S. exists solely to provide a dispassionate measurement of a student's aptitude for each rung of the educational ladder. It doesn't. In addition to its array of school admissions tests, it supplies tests for the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Department, the National Security Council, the International Council for Shopping Centers, the American Society of Plumbing Engineers and a slew of other professional organizations. Its tests determine who gets certified as a golf pro, a real estate agent or a beautician. It also maintains one of the largest collections of financial information about American citizens through its College Scholarship Service, which annually processes millions of financial aid forms for scholarships, grants and loans. These and other E.T.S. programs and services are "bought" by applicants who have no choice but to pay for them because the institutions to which they are applying require them. The institutions get the information free or very cheaply.

Because E.T.S. wields such power over the entry into American schools and professions, and because it is a private, nonprofit, unregulated company, it is a tempting target for the investigative journalist. The company presents itself as an island of scientific objectivity in a sea of subjective

Nina Barrett is a New York City writer.

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teachers, admissions officers and employers. David Owen presents E.T.S. as a self-serving, fraudulent organization which deliberately misleads test takers and admissions officers, spends money frivolously on bogus research projects, tolerates no dissension within its ranks and will go to almost any length to defend itself from outside scrutiny.

Owen is well supplied with the persistence and zeal necessary to buttress his flamboyant rhetoric. From his opening line, "The not-for-profit are different from you and me," followed by an ironic description of E.T.S.'s resortlike 400-acre headquarters, his tone is one of unrestrained contempt. His touch is so deft that it's easy to root for him even when you suspect he is hitting below the belt. E.T.S. got wind of Owen's attitude while he was researching an article for *Harper's*, which became the basis for this book, and simply stopped talking to him. Instead of slowing him down, the company's unresponsiveness has enabled Owen to dramatize his argument that it is fanatically defensive.

What does a company as rich and powerful as E.T.S. have to be defensive about? For starters, the fundamental assumptions underlying the use of standardized tests are that they are objective and that they measure aptitude. The debate that has gone on for many years now about cultural bias in the tests has undercut both arguments. Owen points out that the term "objective" can accurately refer only to the way the tests are graded: multiple-choice questions, unlike essay questions, can be checked for right and wrong answers. But even if something as objective as a machine grades the tests, the questions must first be written by subjective human beings.

Another assumption about E.T.S. is that its questions are devised by scholars, teachers or at the very least specially trained employees. In fact, the question writers are most often E.T.S. secretaries, college students on vacation and graduate students doing a bit of moonlighting. As Owen puts it, "These tests are written by ordinary people who quite possibly didn't do as well on their SATs as you did on yours." Since it's tough to make multiple-choice questions difficult because the answers are right there on the page, Owen argues that question writers, consciously or unconsciously, tend to make them ambiguous. His point about ambiguity is that if more than one answer is plausible, a test taker who is forced to choose from among them without giving any explanation is hardly demonstrating aptitude for the sort of thinking a college education should demand. The same argument applies to the professional tests: How many multiple-choice problems have you had to tussle with on the job recently?

Detecting the rampant ambiguity in SAT verbal aptitude test questions has obviously become a minor obsession for Owen, and he devotes two chapters and an appendix to passionate dissections of sample questions. Many of these are compelling, though some struck me as so nit-picking that I could see why E.T.S. refused to discuss Owen's arguments about them. But Owen is clearly correct about the company's desperate pretense that its questions are infallible. It spent more than $600,000 lobbying against New York State's "truth-in-testing" law which made it possible for test takers to obtain copies of their tests and answer sheets. Until that law was passed, there was no way a student could protest the scoring of a question. To date, E.T.S. has still never rescored a verbal aptitude question in dispute, and in 1981, when a test taker filed a $38 suit in small claims court because E.T.S. had refused to give him credit for a geometry problem he had successfully challenged, E.T.S. spent a year and thousands of dollars in legal fees to defeat him.

The company is equally sensitive on the issue of coaching for its tests, since it claims to be testing aptitude and aptitude can hardly be coached. The SATs, however, *can* be coached, and for anyone planning to take the tests, this book is well worth reading for its two chapters on coaching alone. Owen provides a consumer's guide to the SAT preparation books currently on the market and warns that most of them are likely to hurt your performance because they are concocted by people unfamiliar with the way the tests work. If you're able to shell out $500, Owen says, your best bets are the Pretest Review and the Princeton Review, two courses whose founders have done extensive analyses of the SAT recipe and claim to improve their students' combined math and verbal scores by 185 to 250 points. Both courses are based on the idea that the key to test success lies not in polishing your math and verbal skills but in knowing enough about the way E.T.S. puts a question together to be able to find the answer by taking it apart. Owen, the course founders and one Princeton Review teacher I talked to all insist that in some cases you don't even have to read the question.

Terrified by the threat coaching poses to its claims of measuring aptitude, E.T.S. continues to insist that coaching doesn't work, even in the face of evidence produced by its own researchers. Owen observes that researchers who produce such traitorous results tend to be fired as part of "cost-cutting" measures.

At any rate, E.T.S. seems to be soft-pedaling the "aptitude" issue these days; after forty years of aptitude testing it is now evincing some uncertainty about what aptitude actually is. The section of the Graduate Record Examination formerly called the Aptitude Test has been renamed the General Test, and E.T.S. literature has dropped all references to aptitude in favor of something called "developed ability." "What will the tests be called next?" asks Owen. "Only your thesaurus knows."

Whatever E.T.S. would like us to think it's measuring, one is shocked to discover that the only claim it makes for the SATs is that they help predict freshman year grades. But by E.T.S.'s own calculations, the correlation between SAT scores and freshman grades is slightly lower than the correlation between high-school averages and freshman grades.

Since admissions officers routinely require high-school grades as part of an applicant's file, what use do they make of SAT scores? Some people believe that high scores improve the chances of candidates whose high-school grades are undistinguished. But several admissions officers interviewed by Owen say that this so-called underachiever is the "worst college candidate in the world." On the other hand, says Owen, "every admissions officer I've ever talked to has told me that no student with good grades was ever rejected solely because his test scores were low."

So the most pragmatic argument to be made against standardized testing is that it is superfluous. How come no one's caught on to this yet? The students, who spend time preparing for the tests, spend money to take them and spend emotional energy worrying about the results, don't question college admissions offices for requiring the scores. The admissions offices have no reason *not* to require them, since it

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doesn't cost them anything to get the results. Owen cites a pair of E.T.S. researchers (subsequently fired) who found that even among "non-selective" colleges which accept 90 percent or more of their applicants, more than three-quarters required candidates to submit test scores.

If the SATs are superfluous, then the waste of time and money they entail is cause enough to abolish them—which is Owen's recommended course of action. Unfortunately, the tests have other uses. SAT scores are cited as evidence for all sorts of arguments, ranging from inherent differences in racial intelligence to the decline in quality of our school system. As Owen puts it:

> When studies show that the wealthy in America generally score higher on aptitude tests than the poor, people begin to talk about genetically determined differences in "mental capacity"; when studies show that Japanese and Taiwanese first-graders score higher on aptitude tests than their American counterparts, people talk about "low teacher salaries and curriculum content."

Owen doesn't think multiple-choice tests tell us anything more about the quality of education than they do about individual intelligence. On the contrary, "by helping to shift emphasis [in the schools] from learning to test scores, E.T.S. has contributed greatly to the very decline in quality it elsewhere claims to have served the country by measuring." If colleges want a test that will tell them something useful about how well a candidate is prepared for college-level work, he says, then the colleges should get together and construct nonmultiple-choice achievement tests which would force high schools to upgrade their curriculums so that "learning and 'coaching' would be indistinguishable."

David Owen makes his proposal for reform rather pessimistically, acknowledging that the people whose interests it would serve aren't likely to exert the pressure necessary to change the system. He has a point there. If I'd read *None of the Above* as a high-school junior, I'd like to think I would have organized a boycott of the SATs. But it's probably more accurate to say I would have picked up the phone and dialed the Princeton Review. □

The Nonreaders

ANDREW HACKER

ILLITERATE AMERICA. *By Jonathan Kozol. Anchor Press/Doubleday. 270 pp. $15.95.*

"Poison: Contains sodium hydroxide. . . . Causes severe eye and skin damage, may cause blindness. . . . If swallowed, give large quantities of milk or water. Do not induce vomiting." Unfortunately, one-third of the adult population cannot read or understand these warnings on a can of Drano. Almost as many are unable to address an ordinary letter or read a note from their child's teacher, let alone ascertain if their paycheck is correct. A similar fraction cannot use the help-wanted columns, fill in employment applications or refer to written instructions on the job. Due to inadequate literacy, 30 percent of U.S. Navy recruits have been found to be "a danger to themselves and to costly naval equipment."

Along with all our other epithets, we must bear that of Illiterate America, the title of Jonathan Kozol's impassioned book. According to his calculations, 25 million adult men and women cannot read at all, or do not do so in their daily functioning. Another 35 million are "marginal" illiterates, mired below the ninth-grade level. Needless to say, millions of American youngsters seem destined for lives just as bleak. Indeed, in literacy rates, we are not much better than many Third World countries. Kozol tells us that among the 158 members of the United Nations, we rank forty-ninth on its literacy scale. Despite that, the Federal government allocates only $100 million annually for adult reading instruction.

Unhappily, this book is not easy to read. It is tendentious, repetitious and assumes prior agreement with most of its assumptions. Kozol details the personal and social impact of illiteracy largely in anecdotal terms. He tells of a Detroit woman who bought a gallon

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can of Crisco, thinking it contained the chicken pictured on the label. He says that the imprisonment of more than half the nation's inmates can be "directly linked to functional illiteracy," a statement that may well be true but is not easily verified. I am sure that industrial accidents due to unheeded warnings cost "several billion dollars," but I would like more than that open-ended sum. The real problem is not that millions of people cannot read at all; compared with the past, that group is relatively small. Rather, it is that today's society requires a "functional literacy" at least at a high-school reading level. Simple repairs of one radar system have 165 pages of instructions in eight different manuals.

Needless to say, Kozol has little good to say about the schools. Businesses spend heavily on in-house education but mainly to enhance skills of employees who are already literate. When the military is pressed for recruits, it takes dropouts and consigns them to reading classes. However, in this instruction, "the interests of the individual are subordinate to the goals and missions of the organization." Kozol tells of one young man who went through such schooling. His letters home contained misspellings like "freinds," "imposibble" and "terrifyed." However, "weapons," "enemy" and "deployment" came out perfectly. I'm not sure I believe it, but it makes a good story.

Race looms large in Kozol's treatment, as it has in all his books, beginning with *Death at an Early Age*, eighteen years ago. Forty-four percent of black adults lack basic reading skills, almost three times the white ratio. It doesn't start out this way. Tests conducted in Cleveland's schools show that in kindergarten, white and black children have similar reading scores, with 75 percent at or above the national level. By eleventh grade, whites are still at that standard, while almost 60 percent of the black students have fallen below the nationwide norm. Kozol notes that black leaders have said little about this problem, lest they be accused of blaming the victim. On the contrary, he says, "naming the victim is the first step in a struggle to remove the chains." If that is so, another fact must be faced. Not the least learning barrier for black youngsters is the diction they absorb in their surroundings. Kozol does not raise this sensitive point, I suspect because he does not wish to offend people he works with at the local level. Even so, his book's premise is that surviving in America requires mastering "white" English.

There remains the question of how lower-class illiteracy, the focus of the book, relates to the oral and visual tenor of our times. People at every level read and write less than their class counterparts of earlier periods. At issue here is not only the influence of television, but also the role of sensual stimulation—marijuana, sex and rock music—in the lives of young people. Even Ivy League professors complain that their students fail to grasp allusions to standard literary works. Kozol tells us that not only *Time* and *Newsweek* but also *The New Republic*, *National Review* and, yes, *The Nation* "are written at a minimum of twelfth grade level." On this score, *Illiterate America* itself provides some of its own best evidence. The book is studded with snappy one-line paragraphs. Moreover, its author, a Harvard graduate and former Rhodes Scholar, misquotes and mispunctuates two passages from Shakespeare.

Given the magnitude of the problem, the solution Kozol offers seems relatively easy. Or at least could be, given a conjunction of will and ideology. He tells us that Cuba, Nicaragua and parts of rural Brazil have all but abolished illiteracy by infusing the campaigns with a political content. He believes such "politicized and ethically impassioned literacy action" can be achieved in the United States, and he describes one case where "middle class outsiders" captured the confidence of inner-city adolescents. Let Kozol tell the story:

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In less than sixty days of three-hour sessions in the basement of a church in one of Boston's poorest ghetto neighborhoods, twenty-five workers—nonprofessionals like myself whose only preparation was a ten-day course provided by a militant young teacher—were able to bring 250 adolescents from a reading competence equivalent to that of second or third grade to a level of effectiveness that corresponds to sixth grade competence within a good suburban school.

Let's read that again. Sixty days works out to about twelve weeks, or a summer of three-hour sessions. If I read Kozol correctly, the 250 teen-agers were taught in a single church basement. Even with three shifts, this meant some eighty students on the premises at any given time. The twenty-five neophyte teachers needed only a ten-day course themselves to acquire the basics of both phonics and word recognition, and to learn how to hold the attention of students not notably attuned to prolonged classroom sitting. We are led to believe that none of the 250 dropped out and that everyone did their homework for each class. With only 180 hours of instruction, the entire contingent advanced more than three grade levels, to "a good suburban" standard.

Even if this account strains credulity, we have the author's avowal that the project worked. So it shouldn't be too hard to enlist groups of twenty-five amateurs willing to devote 180 summer hours to an important cause. In fact, Kozol tells us that since 1980, "over-10,000 [college] students have supplied me with their names, addresses, and phone numbers," offering to take part in such teaching. That's 400 cadres right there. Borrowing enough church basements should not be too great a problem.

There can be no denying the problems described in *Illiterate America*, even given its tendency toward overstatement. An inability to read is yet one more of our nation's shames, along with violence, bad nutrition and irresponsible sex. Herein lies the weakness of Jonathan Kozol's well-intentioned book: it lacks an overall context. Almost all the illiterate people he cites belong to this country's underclass. They are citizens who learn at an early age that the economy and society have little need for them. Raised in forsaken neighborhoods and sent to schools that hardly care if they are there, it is amazing that so many muster the strength to climb out. Why has the society Kozol calls the "richest, most developed and advanced" produced such a class? One answer is that our variant of capitalism throws people on their own, caring less than other profit systems about those who fall behind. In fact, measured in per capita well-being, we are no longer the richest or most advanced. Our underclass pulls down our ranking, in infant mortality and a dozen other indexes. Lack of literacy is but one side-effect of life below the margin. □

Everything's Up-to-Date In Minnesota

ELIZABETH POCHODA

One of the sounds of spring in Minnesota this year is the gentle suggestion of air hissing from Governor Rudy Perpich's colorful education balloon, Access to Excellence. Of all the newly minted school reforms set before state legislatures across the country, Perpich's troubled proposal is the boldest effort to improve a state's education system without resorting to the punitive measures customary elsewhere. Perpich plans no competence test or system of merit pay for teachers, no changes in promotion or graduation requirements for students or rules limiting their extracurricular activities—in short, none of the hickory stick stuff popular in places like Texas, where state education policy has been hastily made at the expense of teacher and student morale and educational equity.

There are a lot of reasons why education watchers are watching things in Minnesota. Not the least of them is the happy fact that the controversy there has turned from our national orgy of school abuse and put public schools squarely on the offensive again. What the Governor has proposed, and what the Minnesota State Legislature has thus far resisted, is a swift new version of an old plan: open enrollment—also known by the equally tainted names "the voucher system" or "family choice"—operating on a statewide basis for *public schools only*. (Similar plans sitting before other state legislatures have excited less interest because they have been less scrupulous about eliminating private and parochial schools from their proposals.) Simply put, this means that if Perpich's plan were to pass, and many suppose that sooner or later it will, given the Governor's popularity and his intransigence, all Minnesota families will be able to decide which public school their children will attend. What this would mean for education in the Gopher State depends very much on who you talk to there.

Do these children need such dramatic changes in their education? Nearly everyone agrees that the state's schools compare very favorably with those in the rest of the country. But as one observer points out, Minnesota is not a crisis-driven state; its reforms are usually designed to expand opportunities before crises occur. Put another way, Minnesota is the liberal's dream state, the Mecca of the meritocracy where, in popular mythology at least, everyone can make it. And so, Access to Excellence was designed to make a pretty good thing a lot better: to increase the autonomy of local school districts in determining the programs their students and teachers need; to create enough alternatives so that schools can vary as widely as the children they serve; to move away from the traditional state-mandated curriculum, freeing the state to develop ideas and models (a model math and science school, a model school for the arts) which localities can adopt or not as they please. There's a good deal of talk about autonomy and empowerment for everyone in Minnesota these days.

The hitch, as in all open enrollment plans, is that the threat of competition is the goad to improvement. Schools must compete with one another to keep and attract students because school districts can no longer count on the traditional certainties of public school administrators: local kids and local and state money to educate them. Under the voucher system the tax money accompanies the child from district of residence to district of enrollment. Open enrollment also tends to create a frenzy of innovation, as schools scramble to diversify, specialize and develop alternative styles to lure customers.

Competition is the incentive and excellence the goal in Minnesota, but you don't have to think too hard before other problems suggest themselves. Rudy Perpich seems to know this, and

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his plan tries hard to anticipate and solve some of its more obvious difficulties:

§ School districts are not required to accept transfer students, but if they do they must accept all who apply. If space is limited, selection must be done by lottery. In other words, there should be no way for a school to carve out a great hockey team for itself by the careful selection of applicants.

§ Districts with desegregation plans may deny students access if admitting them would put the district out of compliance with the plan. The formulas for allowing movement into and out of these districts are elaborate contraptions which are supposed to make a shift in racial balance almost impossible.

§ Minnesota is a big state where transportation is a big issue. Students will be responsible for getting to the border of the "foreign" district, and that district will receive enough state transportation aid to get the student the rest of the way to school. Families in financial need will be eligible for additional transportation aid.

§ Since choosing schools requires more parental savvy than exists in most families, there are plans for getting the word out and for involving communities in making information available.

§ To avoid the closing of small schools in sparsely populated areas, the plan provides for state aid to compensate small districts that lose students during the first two years of the plan. After that there will be an evaluation to determine whether kids are leaving small schools to go to larger ones and whether open enrollment has encouraged small schools to cooperate, pool resources, diversify and therefore remain open.

§ If the state is not going to regulate education with mandates, it still wants to check up on the schools' performance. The plan proposes the development of a statewide achievement test, the results of which will be published on a school-by-school basis. (In its emphasis on standardized tests as a measure of learning, Minnesota joins the testing mania rampant in the rest of the country.)

Those are some of the Governor's preemptive strikes, many of them the fruits of open enrollment experiments in the Minneapolis–St. Paul area, where the creation of a variety of alternative schools (Visual and Performing Arts, Radio Broadcasting, Science, Math and Technology, Fundamentals and so on) is said to have stopped the flight from public schools. If Perpich's plan sounds workable on paper, it sounds even better when you talk to Ted Kolderie, senior fellow at the Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs in Minneapolis and the Dr. Pangloss of Minnesota's voucher system.

Kolderie invites hard questions, and the outsider doesn't need Garrison Keillor's Minnesota Language Systems cassettes ("How to speak and understand Minnesotan like a native") to decode his answers. He lists the constituencies that have backed the Governor's bill (from diverse minority groups to the P.T.A., the League of Women Voters, the Minnesota Business Partnership and the newspapers, urban and rural) but acknowledges that most of the state education organizations (the School Boards Association, the Association of School Administrators and the two teachers' unions) have been vehemently opposed. He attributes their balkiness to the present system's ability to protect educators from their failures, something the competitive nature of the voucher system would make a whole lot harder. He also notes, rather slyly, that after months of open discussion on the proposed bill, the education groups came into the 1985 legislative session with no proposals of their own and no real position on the Governor's plan except that they were against it, warning that it would make rural schools disappear.

Kolderie can handle an objection like that without raising his voice. Like most everyone who favors the plan, he suspects that the education organizations have exploited the fears of the rural population. While he argues that "a town will suffer rather than prosper if its children are required to attend a local school where course offerings are limited," he also expresses sympathy for the opposition of farmers, whose farms are endangered by foreclosure and who don't want to lose their schools as well.

Even though he is sanguine about the prospects of rural schooling under the open enrollment plan, Kolderie admits that it is there, in the rural areas, that family choice presents the most serious problems. Still, faced with the specter of a small town's school disappear-

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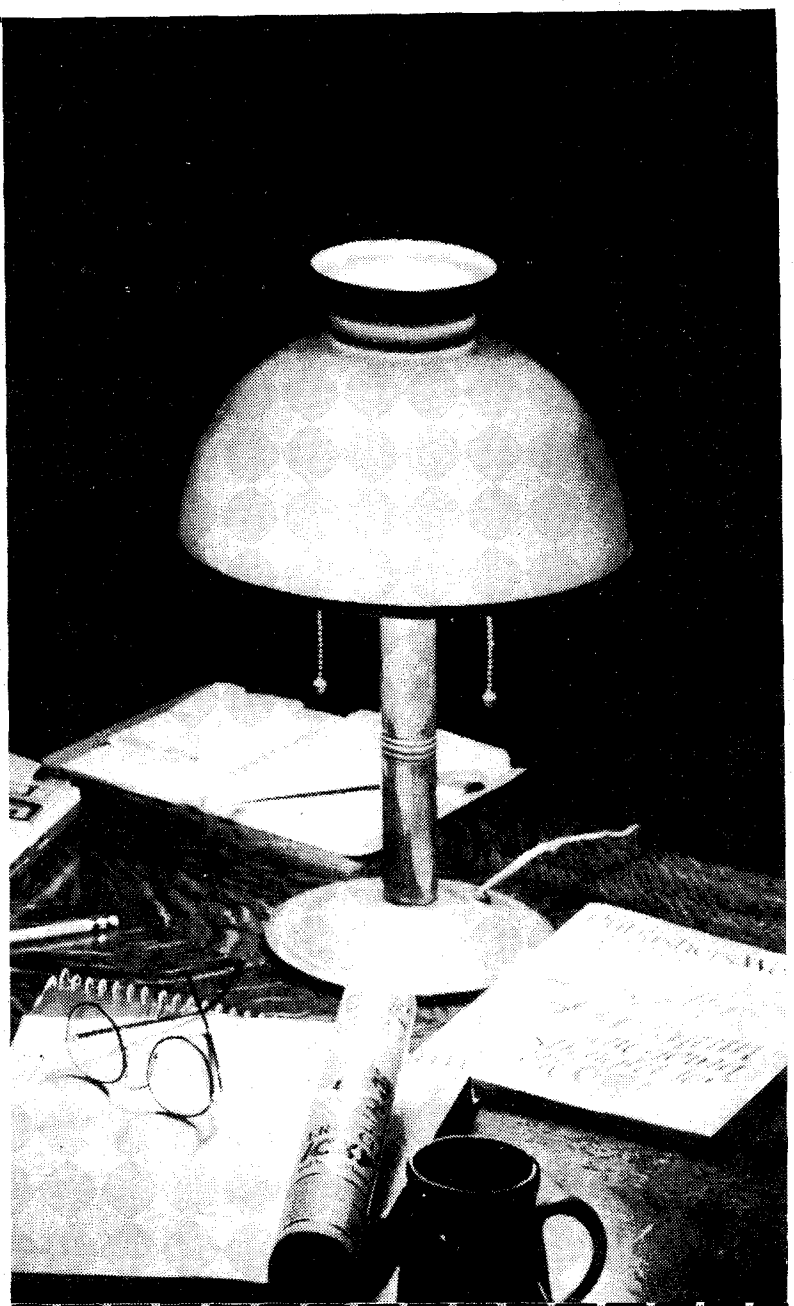

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ing as a consequence of students "tuitioning out," as it is called, most supporters hope that things won't come to that. Joe Nathan, author of *Free to Teach* and a public school educator from St. Paul who helped write the Governor's bill, prefers to ignore competition and talks instead of cooperation between districts—of their willingness to share resources and provide alternatives so that a town faced with student flight could redesign its school to keep some of its students while attracting others.

Let a thousand flowers bloom. It could happen. There are precedents in the state for just such rescue missions by diversification or specialized offerings ("You teach more foreign languages; we'll offer computer courses; then we'll trade students, teachers and materials"), but there's a dizzying hustle and bustle to it all which has not done anything to allay the fears of many.

If the hum of students, teachers and even schools perpetually on the move along the rural byways of the state is a disquieting prospect, the whiff of business lingo attached to the plan is for some Minnesotans even more upsetting. The education organizations see little more in Access to Excellence than a thinly veiled business plot to educate a competent work force at no additional cost. Kolderie finds that attitude disingenuous. "Most businesses are monopolies, and education as it exists now is a monopoly," he comments. "This plan is simply a competitive model, and those against it seem to be against it out of a reflexive hatred of business civilization."

That may be, but for all its goodheartedness and rigorous efforts at equity, the plan is widely known to have sprung from a glossy little report commissioned by the Minnesota Business Partnership, an organization which includes familiar businesses like General Mills and Land O'Lakes and the harder-edged high-tech industries prominent in the state. The M.B.P. asked Berman Weiler Associates, a California consulting group, for a study on public education in Minnesota. The Berman Weiler report bears little resemblance to Perpich's bill either in its particulars—it recommends the inclusion of private schools in a voucher plan—or in its spirit, which is bureaucratic and coolly Martian. To their credit, Perpich's team came up with a proposal that feels a little more local in character and tries hard to concern itself with problems of community. Nevertheless, as Nathan points out, the odor of business has clung to the bill and has been useful to its opponents.

The connection between business language and vouchers is more than simply coincidental or superficial. As soon as you begin talking about a free market in education, free-market terminology springs up everywhere. Under a voucher system, families who choose a school outside their voting district have a "customer" relationship with the school. If they don't like the "product," they can "shop" elsewhere. The language may be unpleasant but it has stuck, and it has inspired members of the Minnesota Education Association, one of the state's two teachers' unions, to characterize the plan as a rich kids' program which favors adept consumers, a self-help plan for baby sharks. Peter Pafiolis of the M.E.A. insists that open enrollment programs always reward an elite because only they can afford the hidden costs of moving their children around. To such charges Ted Kolderie has a quick answer:

> The public school system as it now exists is already inequitable. Houses of

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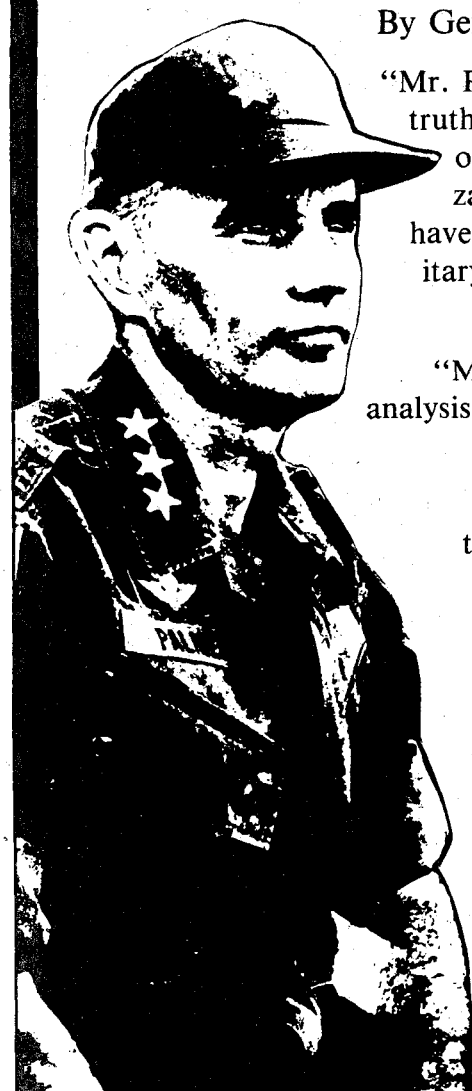

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like value are built together; people are grouped in neighborhoods by income level, race and class; and this stratifies schools. When you add to this the tracking that goes on inside the schools you don't have much of a melting pot to point to.

True enough, but whether a family choice plan can reverse things and create a mix of income levels, classes and races in the schools remains to be seen. Certainly the backers of Access to Excellence believe it can, and point to that as one reason for their enthusiasm.

Not all the opposition to the Governor's bill is crouched in the crude bunker of self-interest and fear of failing. Art Naftlin, Mayor of Minneapolis from 1961 to 1969, confesses that he sees no necessary connection between competition and improved education. He also forecasts an administrative nightmare and worries that Access to Excellence is the thin end of the wedge that will inevitably bring private and parochial schools into the family choice plan.

On the last of these matters—a suspicion among voucher opponents everywhere—there appears to be little cause for alarm in Minnesota. The private and parochial schools have already tried to wiggle their way into the bill and have been turned back. The M.E.A. raises still other objections which presumably do not bear on the educators' self-interest. What's to prevent students from moving between districts for all sorts of ignoble reasons that have nothing to do with academic opportunity? Is it really fair to inhibit the movement of children in districts with desegregation plans? If districts do not have to participate in open enrollment, won't rich and successful school systems in suburbs such as Edina be reluctant to admit a minority population from South Minneapolis?

Once you move away from the heat generated by the Governor's bill in Minnesota, discussions of its drawbacks take on a different temper. In general, voucher plans are raising eyebrows precisely because they appear to reinforce the intense competitiveness that is the order of the day in education. *Choosing Equality*, a forthcoming report sponsored by the New World Foundation, quite accurately describes the present educational atmosphere as one in which no one feels they "can stand aside, or set their children apart from the scramble for dwindling oppor-

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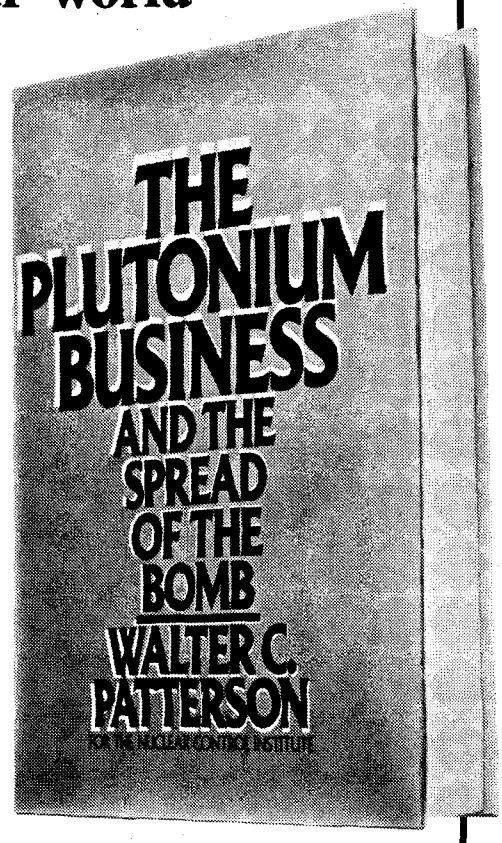

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tunities." In conversation, Colin Greer, one of the authors of the report, makes his objection to family choice plainer: "The voucher system is the perfect yuppie plan—resorting to individualized solutions which deny community." But after expressing doubts about whether the open market can do any more than give poor and minority consumers the right to choose from among poor schools, the authors of *Choosing Equality* set forth the conditions under which open enrollment can succeed.

Their recommendations are based in part on observation of open enrollment's eleven years of success in New York City's District Four, the area of East Harlem that Anthony Alvarado improved so dramatically when he was the district's superintendent. On paper at least, the Minnesota plan seems to satisfy most of the objections of this group of education watchers, even if it can't rid itself of the trickle-down competitiveness that is built into the model.

In this atmosphere of competition, other worries arise, among them the parental anxiety that choosing a school creates. No one wants a child to miss the bus, and parents faced with choices are beset by worries that the wrong one may leave their child walking home in the rain. Deborah Meier, director of Central Park East, an alternative elementary school in District Four, thinks it's possible that "parents are more anxious today than they've ever been before." She notes that the opportunity to choose from among the schools in her district does not necessarily diminish that anxiety.

Anxiety is also aggravated by parents' sense that they *must* shop for a school because they are powerless to improve the one in their neighborhood. From there, it's only a short step to another kind of worry: that when you send your child to a school you don't know very well in a different neighborhood, "you don't have all that useful gossip from the community," as Meier explains. "There are a lot of mothers who don't know their children very well, who don't see their child in the context of other children. Who will they have to talk to when they worry about the school?" Looked at this way, the empowerment of parents that Minnesota's Joe Nathan envisions might also result in their sense of powerlessness.

Even solutions such as a lottery system for selecting students when there aren't enough places to go around begin to look questionable when you consider some of the social costs. The mix of students created by open enrollment, the lottery and all the traveling here and there doesn't do much for the stability of communities. Among other things, it will very likely erode neighborhood politics, which, Greer suggests, have been traditionally centered around the schools. Theodore Sizer, former headmaster at Phillips Academy at Andover and author of *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*, is intrigued by the stirrings in Minnesota and thinks some of the worries might be defused by emphasizing the school itself as a community, the way private schools do. But even with this, the issue of a community's political losses will remain.

If you use a lottery, you avoid the dangers of inequity. If you don't, you have to be, as Meier says, "thoroughly committed to heterogeneity and to taking difficult kids. We hold each other to that commitment in the selection of students, and we try to get families that are committed to the school." The payoff for this selectivity should be a heightened sense of community, where

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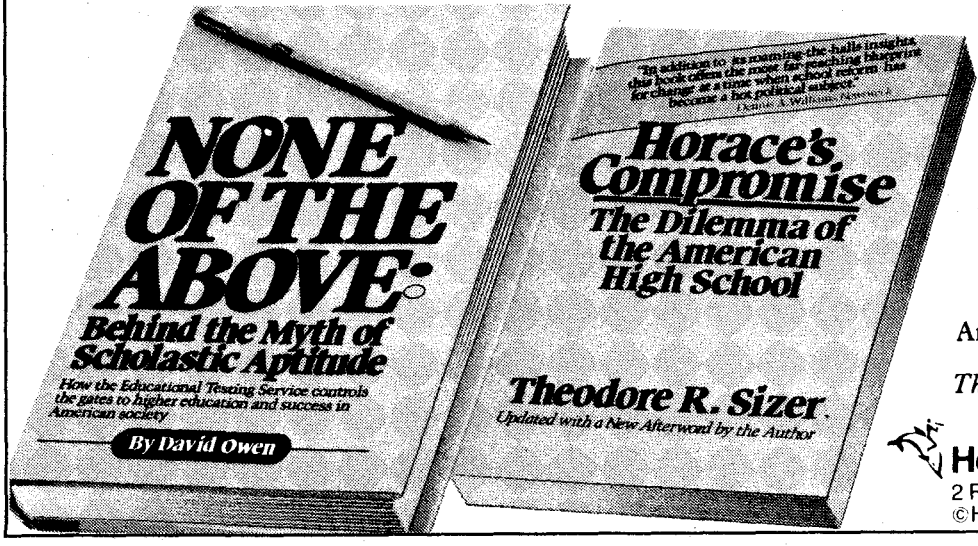
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parents trust a school enough so that their children feel free to learn there. That's something they might think about in Minnesota, where the statewide scale of the proposed reform may be inimical to trust of this kind and where community in the largest sense is being eroded in the controversy over open enrollment.

Underlying these reservations about competition, parental anxiety and the erosion of community is an issue that relates directly to the bill's troubles: the problems that beset all efforts to make enormous changes at the last minute. Nathan admits that the three months between the Governor's speech on education and the introduction of the plan in the Legislature did not give its supporters time to explain the proposal to the public. Yet there is reason to suspect that had the plan been fully implemented this spring, its sudden reforms might not have been as healthy as the Governor imagined. The alternative schools called for in the plan could not be built overnight. The history of alternative schools in New York's District Four is one of incremental innovation, one school feeding into the development of the next. What's to prevent the new schools suggested in Access to Excellence from being no more than paper programs—imaginative, attractive but empty?

None of Rudy Perpich's supporters want Access to Excellence to be an air sandwich, so they might as well take advantage of the benefits that more time can bring: time to explain why this plan will not be another instance of favoring the favored; time to explain the outreach efforts to get communities involved in the counseling process; time for teachers to plan new sorts of schools; time to allow cooperation to pre-empt some of the anxiety and damage of competition; time to address the question posed by those skeptical about the effect of open enrollment plans on the disadvantaged, "How will they do it differently this time?" Above all, they might take time to explain what's really in it for the residents of towns like Garrison Keillor's tiny Lake Wobegone, where "the women are strong, the men are good looking and all the children are [already] above average." □

One Step Forward...

FELICIA E. HALPERT

In many respects, education is more egalitarian now than it was fifteen years ago. Walk into a junior high school and the differences are striking: girls participate in sports that used to be off limits; shop classes are no longer a male domain; and at least some women pictured in textbooks carry wrenches or fire hoses, not laundry. But equity is still a long way off. Although the myth that boys are innately better at science is losing ground, more boys than girls still enroll in advanced math and computer courses. The vast majority of girls in vocational education programs are preparing for traditionally female jobs like nursing or secretarial work. And America's teenage pregnancy rate, the highest in the industrialized world, continues to rise because of Federal hostility to birth-control agencies, local opposition to sex-education programs and the poverty of most young women's options.

If the Reagan Administration persists in the work of its first term, progress toward educational equity may halt altogether. The Administration is systematically undermining Federal laws and programs designed to increase opportunities for girls, particularly Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendment. Title IX declares that "no person...shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." Though it cannot be credited with all the improvements in girls' education, it has played a crucial role. Title IX is directly responsible for the sharp increase in the proportion of women among medical school entrants, from 11 percent in 1972 to 26 percent in 1980. Because of it, guidance counselors must use the same testing procedures for male and female students, and pregnant students can no longer be expelled or excluded from school activities. In athletics Title IX has won dramatic gains for girls. According to the Women's Sports Foundation, there were more than 10,000 college scholarships available to women in 1984 where almost none had existed in 1972. Between 1971 and 1983, the number of girls among high-school athletes rose from 7.5 percent to 34.6 percent.

Even where Title IX has not produced measurable improvements, it has established a framework within which to develop a nondiscriminatory school system. Since the law was passed, some of the country's largest textbook publishers have established equity guidelines, and many school districts have added equity to their criteria for book selection. The law enshrined the principle of equal education for the sexes in national policy and helped bring it into the mainstream culture.

But in the 1984 Supreme Court case *Grove City College v. Bell*, the Administration argued successfully that Title IX can be applied only to specific programs funded by the Federal government, not throughout the institutions that carry them. The Court's ruling reversed a longstanding government position, supported by Republican and Democratic Administrations alike, and reopened the way to blatantly discriminatory practices. Within a week of the decision the Department of Education began closing its files on pending discrimination cases, even though no new policy regulations had been drawn up. The National Women's Law Center estimates that at least sixty-three such cases have either been dropped or put on hold.

Reagan and company have also put considerable time and effort into gutting the eleven-year-old Women's Educational Equity Act program (WEEA). WEEA studies issues affecting women's education, channels grant money to model programs designed to study and eliminate sexism in schools, and develops and distributes nonsexist teaching materials. In its 1980 *Mandate for Leadership*, the Heritage Foundation urged that the program be "drastically cut" because of its role as an "important resource for the practice of feminist policies and politics." Since then, funding has been reduced from $10 million to $6 million, and each year the Administration has attempted to eliminate the program entirely. In 1982 the regular procedure for reviewing grant applications was overturned, and the grant committee was packed with representatives of groups like Phyllis

Felicia E. Halpert is a writer who teaches at St. Anne's School in Brooklyn.

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Schlafly's Eagle Forum. Public outcry forced the Administration to use Federal employees to review the applications in the next two years. But the Administration did succeed in downgrading the agency's status and dismissing its director, Leslie Wolfe, after she was attacked for being a feminist in *Conservative Digest*.

In 1982 the White House sacked all seventeen members of the National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs, established by WEEA to hold hearings, issue reports and advise the Secretary of Education and the ...rector of WEEA. Previously bipartisan, the advisory council was staffed with Reagan appointees who immediately changed the council's personnel policy in order to oust longtime executive director Joy Simonson. She too was replaced by an established member of the Eagle Forum.

Reagan has also launched an attack on social programs created to make education more equitable. The Administration seeks deep cuts in student financial aid and would like to wipe out the ten regional centers established under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to monitor desegregation of schools by sex, race and national origin. The centers, located on university campuses throughout the country, provide technical assistance and advice to public school systems seeking to meet Title IX requirements.

Congress has opposed the President on the issue of educational equity, but it has been unable to counter the Administration's policies. The Civil Rights Act of 1984, which would have reversed the Grove City ruling on Title IX, was passed by an overwhelming majority in the House only to be frustrated, filibustered and finally shelved in the Republican Senate. The 1985 version of the bill is in the last stages of consideration in the House; its prospects in the Senate remain unclear. Congress has succeeded in reauthorizing the WEEA program through 1989 with a higher funding ceiling than expected, and in establishing a requirement that future appointees must have experience in the equity field. But though WEEA continues to distribute funds, it is no longer considered to be on the cutting edge of the matter.

In the face of the government's attack on equity, a greater burden falls on school administrators, teachers and parents. Teachers especially need to develop greater sensitivity to the problem. Remarkably, though, a 1977 study of teacher-education textbooks conducted at the American University on a WEEA grant showed that 95 percent gave the issue of sex equity less than 1 percent of their space. Not one of the texts provided future teachers with resources or strategies to counteract sexism in the schoolroom.

Nevertheless, there has been change, and in a sense, Reagan is attempting to reverse the irreversible. The economic pressures of the past fifteen years have destroyed at least one myth: women no longer just want to work, they need to in order to maintain themselves and their families. That means acquiring marketable skills, and greater educational opportunities are crucial. Awareness of the difficulties facing girls and women has grown. Unfortunately, advocates of educational equity are increasingly hard pressed to turn that awareness into established practice. □

BOOK NOTES.

FRANCIS WILKINSON AND ELIZABETH POCHODA

THE GREAT SCHOOL DEBATE: Which Way for American Education? *Edited by Beatrice and Ronald Gross. Simon & Schuster. 544 pp. $17.95. Paper $9.95.* Undoubtedly assembled for course adoptions and organized in a conspicuously balanced format that gives all views—intelligent and dopey, left and right, practical and theoretical—equal time in the sun, *The Great School Debate* culls a bit of everything from the controversy surrounding the Decline and Fall report of 1983 (*A Nation at Risk*, by the National Commission on Excellence in Education). With its breezy bios of educational *machers* ("Who's Who in the Great Debate"), its list of "Resources for Change" and an all-too-brief bibliography ("The Essential Documents of the Great Debate"), the book is a fairly useful if overly biddable reference work. Deserving of special mention: Russell Baker's "Beset by Mediocrity," an analysis of the woeful grammar and diction in the commission's excellence report.

CHOOSING EQUALITY: The Case for Democratic Schooling. *By Ann Bas-*

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tian, Norm Fruchter, Marilyn Gittell, Colin Greer and Kenneth Haskins. 156 pp. Less than half the size of *The Great School Debate* and much more than twice as useful, this report calmly retakes some of the ground recently ceded to the right on educational matters. What is more, it has an excellent bibliography and is available at no cost from the New World Foundation, 100 East 85th Street, New York, NY 10028.

THE DEVIL IN THE CLASSROOM: Hostility in American Education. *By James Marshall. Schocken. 171 pp. $15.95.* Moviegoers of the three decades between *The Blackboard Jungle* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* will not have failed to notice that anger and mayhem remain the core curriculum of most American schools. James Marshall, who was a member of New York City's Board of Education for seventeen years, has not missed that point either. His book is an anatomy of the hostility that trickles down from administrators through teachers to students, and that trickles back up in the form of boredom, truancy and disorderly conduct. Having explored several models of education, Marshall concludes that the path of least hostility in schooling is the most democratic one. Although many of his recommendations have a touch of the platitudinous, there is nothing wrong with his having injected a little avuncular common sense into the current debate. □

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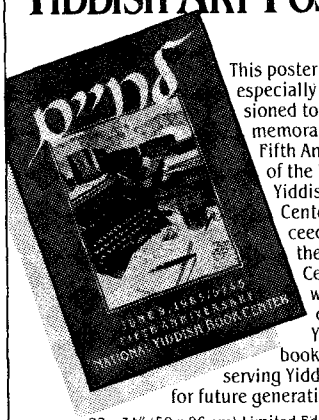

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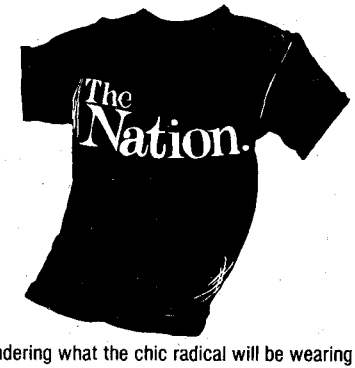

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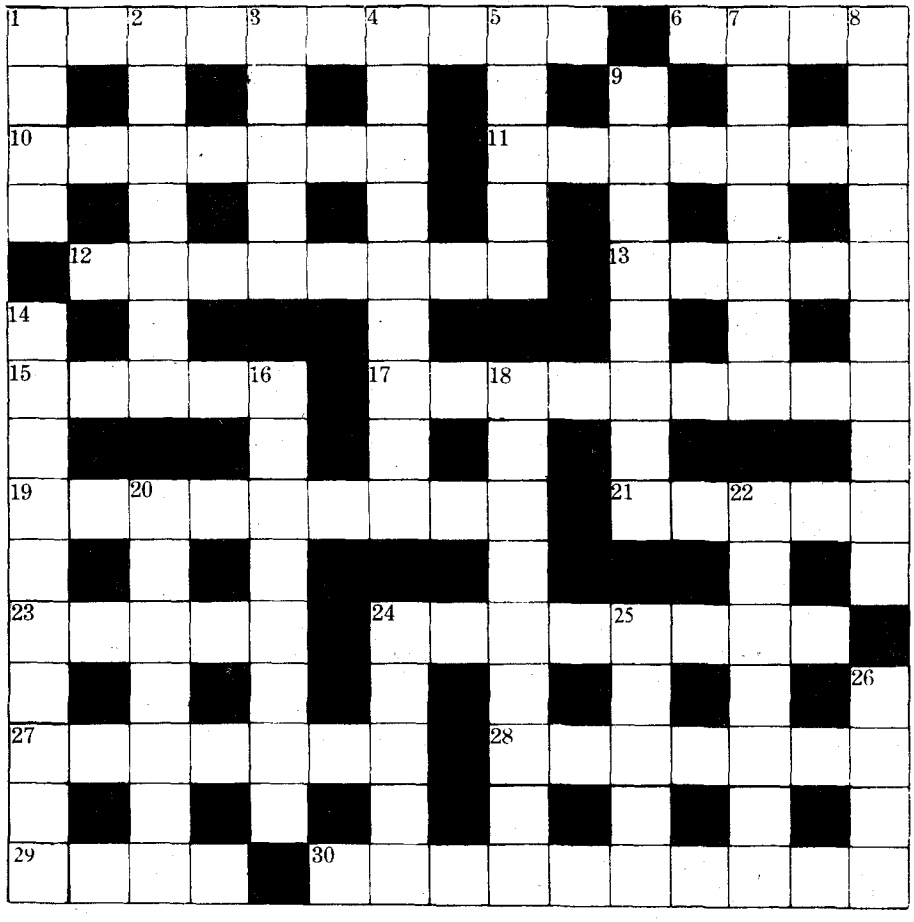
Crossword Puzzle No. 2057

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 A way to create the accomplice of a sharper—Bunker's neighbor. (6,4)
6 Might be constructed without a foundation, at least in economy theory. (4)
10 What the British consider the best thing to put on dessert. (7)
11 In grave with a mixture of acid solution. (7)
12 A lot of water found by little beds of circles, as they say. (8)
13 There have been a few battles here, with a large number in some. (5)
15 They included a spinner, a measurer and a severer. (5)
17 Everything one found in the ball? (A little flirting, certainly!) (9)
19 Last with this and you'll get sort of under, with a broken cane. (9)
21 Brutus was told they were not at fault. (5)
23 Might be equivalent to X, not off the joint. (5)
24 Fido might especially appreciate a complete one, but we sometimes feed it to other animals. (4,4)
27 Like some arachnid, you might get a rough ride when such as Nathan Hale is around. (7)
28 Gives an al fresco performance? (4,3)
29 See 5 down
30 Only a dude? Fair, too! That's good enough! (4,2,4)

DOWN

1 Small parts—possibly right from the horse's mouth! (4)
2 Paradoxically, it's a heroic act to take advantage of someone. (7)
3 An urge for fund-raising—someone might go for it! (5)
4 Tormented by something the hanger did poorly? (9)
5 and 29 across A glutton does, perhaps, but they're meant to make couples comfy. (4,5)
7 What one had for breakfast, possibly? Many confused about it, but one might consider his objective safe. (7)
8 The best are well broken with an animal. (10)
9 Religious know-it-alls? (8)
14 One doesn't like it in the mouth, following a disturbed state. (10)
16 One who occasionally gives the news might prepare pearls for you. (8)
18 It might be termed falsehood in an old caroler, but that's what some thugs do! (3,2,4)
20 Likely to fill an aching void. (7)
22 In La Scala, modern ones might be served with style. (1,2,4)
24 A buoy might get wrecked in such waters. (5)
25 Does what one wants to do on board with friends and lovers. (5)
26 Certainly not an early riser with this and others. (2,2)

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A	■	R	■	N	■	E	■	C	■	E	■	L	■	O
C	O	U	N	T	I	N	G	H	O	U	S	E	S	■
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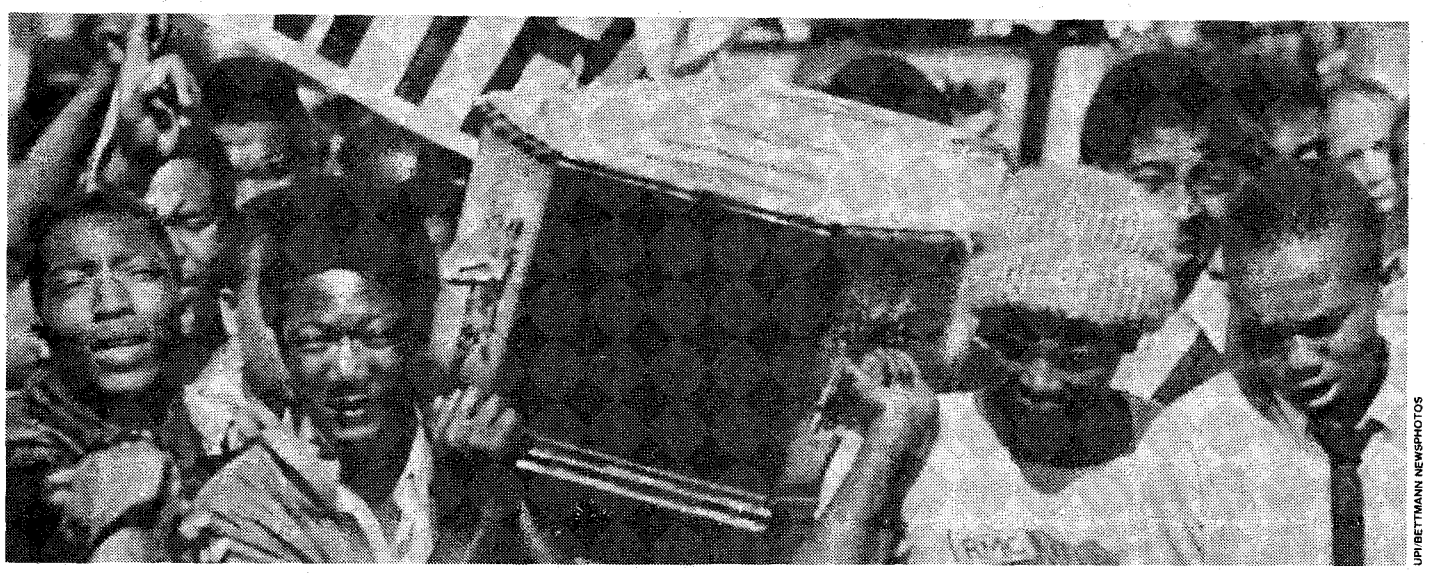

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